

INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this document, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark, it is an indication of either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, duplicate copy, or copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed. For blurred pages, a good image of the page can be found in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted, a target note will appear listing the pages in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed, a definite method of "sectioning" the material has been followed. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. For illustrations that cannot be satisfactorily reproduced by xerographic means, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and inserted into your xerographic copy. These prints are available upon request from the Dissertations Customer Services Department.
5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

**University
Microfilms
International**

300 N. Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

8405804

Sharrett, Christopher Brian

APOCALYPTICISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM: A
TYPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF A THEME IN THE FANTASTIC CINEMA, ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO CULTURAL TRADITION AND CURRENT FILMIC
EXPRESSION

New York University

PH.D. 1983

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1983

by

Sharrett, Christopher Brian

All Rights Reserved

APOCALYPTICISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY
HORROR FILM:
A TYPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF A THEME IN
THE FANTASTIC CINEMA, ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO CULTURAL TRADITION
AND CURRENT FILMIC EXPRESSION

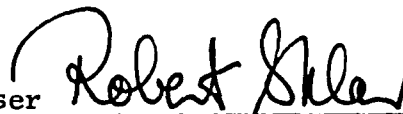
by

Christopher B. Sharrett

A dissertation in the Department of Cinema
Studies submitted to the faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Science in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy at New York University

October 1983

Adviser

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert Sklar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. It is positioned above a horizontal line that spans the width of the signature.

Robert Sklar
Professor

Copyright © by
Christopher B. Sharrett
1983

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
------------------------	---

Chapter

I. THE MYTH OF APOCALYPSE AND THE HORROR FILM: THE PRIMACY OF <u>PSYCHO</u> AND <u>THE BIRDS</u>	30
II. THE NATURE OF APOCALYPTIC CRISIS: HOOPER, CRAVEN, CRONENBERG	54
III. APOCALYPSE INSIDE: THE DUALITY OF THE DEMONIC POSSESSION FILM	139
IV. THE URBAN APOCALYPSE: THE CITY OF MAN AS INNER CIRCLE OF HELL	196
V. THE END OF MYTH: <u>THE LAST WAVE</u> AND <u>APOCALYPSE NOW</u>	267
CONCLUSION	317
BIBLIOGRAPHY	323

INTRODUCTION

In a recent collection of essays on the horror film,¹ Robin Wood has suggested that the genre has entered into its "apocalypse phase," and that this transition has been concurrent with a similar development in other genres, including the Western. Using a critical method rooted strongly in Freud and Marx, Wood and his colleagues touch on the idea of apocalypse in terms of a basic theory of the "return of the repressed," i.e., the tendency of the horror film to express simultaneously a rejection of sexual repression along with all other strictures imposed by capitalism.² Marx has been referred to as millennialist,³ and the contemporary cinema has some revolutionary impulses, yet it seems narrow to interpret the new apocalypticism in strictly ideological terms. Still, what Wood and others have proposed about the horror film (and other genres) seems recognizable and understandable. "Apocalypse" has been used with increasing regularity in criticism over the past decade to describe not only various forms of popular art but a wide range of cultural phenomena. It might be suggested that apocalypticism is an idée fixe of the current intellectual milieu.

¹Andrew Britton, et al., The American Nightmare (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979).

²Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³The most recent study touching on Marxism's utopian/millennic complexion is Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981). A reactionary view of this topic is Melvin Lasky, Utopia and Revolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

This discussion is an attempt to give a fuller interpretation of the modern horror film as apocalyptic literature, to view elements of its apocalypticism in relation to a tradition in American art, and to analyze apocalypse as a form of cultural belief with methods supplied by structural anthropology, mythopoeics, and religious studies, as well as psychoanalysis and ideological criticism, in the hope of showing the relevance of apocalypse to the modern horror film's context. A secondary concern of this investigation will be to examine a form of apocalypticism evident in the horror film's tendency to become increasingly self-reflexive, to "deconstruct" itself, and by so doing to reflect the sense of the bankruptcy of collective beliefs that have frequently been mediated in the conventions of genre film. By understanding the horror film's movement in this direction we can also understand the importance of the genre to apocalypticism in other film forms and the international cinema.

Some qualifications are in order regarding the selection of the horror film as chief representative of the theme of apocalypse in contemporary cinema. First, it would be rather foolhardy, considering the evolution of the genre, to assert too puristic a definition of the horror film. While it is important to have a sense of the genre that will distinguish it from its rather closely related cousin, science-fiction (particularly in relation to its handling of apocalypticism), definitions cannot be too exclusionary, since it seems the business of the horror film to overturn them. We generally associate science-fiction with narratives of advanced technology, utopian or dystopian worlds, space travel, or generally speculative fantasy. The horror film, on the other hand, usually involves elements of the supernatural or explorations into psychopathology and the realm of the unconscious mind. The difficulty here is that recent science-fiction films (e.g.,

Ridley Scott's Alien and Blade Runner, John Carpenter's The Thing) have elements identified with horror, and some important horror directors, such as David Cronenberg, approach the psychopathological and the meta-physical via investigations of the modern technological landscape. More significant, if one were asked to identify an apocalyptic work from a popular genre, the response might be Kubrick's 2001, whose apocalypticism seems in line with Northrop Frye's rather vague definition as "metaphor as pure and potentially total identification, without regard to plausibility or ordinary experience."⁴

It should be clear that this discussion is not concerned with those films involved in extrapolative fantasy (Star Wars, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, etc.). Further, it is not concerned (for reasons I will later elaborate) with that strain of science-fiction connected to the idea of catastrophe (When Worlds Collide). Still, because some of the films to be dealt with herein--such as George Miller's "Mad Max" films--are not easily definable simply as horror films, a degree of flexibility is needed. For this reason the French term referring to the genre of the fantastique seems useful for the way it suggests a type of film involved in a particular realm of the imaginary and with extreme forms of experience. The French approach to fantastic cinema, reflected in such celebrated periodicals as Midi-Minuit Fantastique, shows the impact of psychoanalytic criticism and helps to focus on the significant works of both horror and science-fiction as forms of art explainable by an approach to the unconscious mind and processes of estrangement. Further distinctions between genres will appear as we proceed.

⁴Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 365.

The more specific focus on the horror film and this sector of fantastic cinema has been chosen for several reasons. The apocalypse investigated here is not associated with the definition offered by Frye, nor with notions of revelation (the literal definition of the term), enlightenment, or a monumental transition in the nature of man. While these ideas are certainly elements of the traditional themes of Biblical apocalypse, they are not the chief concern of contemporary popular art, nor have they been foremost as aspects of apocalypticism in the American literary tradition. The contemporary sense of apocalypse is preoccupied, I will argue, with the unrecuperability of society, with the dissolution and futility of all human endeavor. I will show apocalypticism also as a form of projection by demonstrating some of the characteristics of the apocalyptic work and its embodiment of a "political unconscious"⁵ of the current society. The horror film, with its long ties to myth, the supernatural, and the unconscious mind, has come to embody a sense of apocalypse through the representation of a transpsychical crisis, the collapse of myth, and the tendency to undergo a "secularization" whereby the genre actually deconstructs and disaffiliates itself from conventions signifying the supernatural and metaphysical. It is precisely because the modern apocalypse is horrific that the horror film best represents its expression.

The horror film, as Wood suggests, is certainly not the only genre that could be termed apocalyptic in its themes, but it is the one most consistently and consciously involved with apocalypse as a predominant theme.

⁵By this I am not referring specifically to the work of Jameson, but rather to a broader notion of the ways by which the artwork embodies political and social currents as established by a broad range of post-structuralist criticism. Both Marxist and non-Marxist contributors to this critical direction will be significant here, along with founders of the structuralist movement itself such as Lévi-Strauss.

I will demonstrate that the horror film not only bears many of the characteristics of the American apocalyptic literary tradition, but that the centrality of its controlling vision becomes influential on films outside the genre. Actually, the question of "influence" seems pointless to pursue since what will be discovered is that the apocalyptic impulses of the horror film become manifest simultaneously in a wide range of cinema.

One could easily argue that the mainstream international cinema provides at least as many representative instances of the theme of apocalypse as contemporary genre film (e.g., Fellini's La Dolce Vita, Visconti's The Damned, Antonioni's Zabriskie Point). This is true, to a point where we must be cognizant of the ways by which American genre film shares the apocalyptic sensibility of European "high art." Still, the particular apocalypse under consideration here is rather unique. Until the 1970s, one could not find a film genre as consistently preoccupied with apocalypse as the horror/fantastic film. Moreover, no genre held such a distinct view of apocalypse, one clearly affiliated with the sensibility of a religious and literary tradition. While it is worthwhile to compare the apocalyptic horror film to works of the classic cinema, I must argue that the horror film sets the style for the current expression of apocalypticism, and reiterates its concern with the theme on a persistent basis.

II

An understanding of the relevance of apocalypticism to the horror film depends upon some background knowledge of the apocalyptic tradition preceding the American genre film, a demanding subject that needs to be ventured into to provide a framework for this discussion. Today it is truistic to speak of the currency of apocalypticism in American art. Very

recently, "apocalyptic" seems one of the most overused adjectives in popular discourse, and we are somehow supposed to intuit its meaning spontaneously. Certainly apocalyptic ideas are present in American letters from the Puritans to Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville to contemporary horror and science-fiction, but the fixation on Biblical ideas in early American art seems wholly different from the concern with apocalypse expressed; this concern sometimes is not easily explainable through interpretations of apocalyptic expression by literary criticism.

In the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate world of an escalating arms race, economic crisis, and fundamentalist religious fervor, apocalypse appears to have re-entered language out of the sense that doomsday is at the threshold, but that presentist view ignores the origins of apocalypticism as collective belief; it also assumes that there is a collective notion of apocalypse in a pluralistic, secular society. Even within Christianity there is a large gap between the Protestant fundamentalist and Roman Catholic or Anglican approaches to apocalypse as theological belief and basis for a method of historical analysis. The constant reiteration of "apocalyptic" in discourse creates tautology; sheer repetition may be removing from the concept whatever specific signification it once had.

One can establish, it would seem, at the very outset that apocalypse is a term rather vaguely understood and about which there is little clear consensus. The murkiness of this topic would appear to make the particular task at hand more difficult, viz., the demonstration of the modern horror film as the most significant repository of apocalyptic ideas and as a form tending to establish the apocalyptic as a genre unto itself.

What is apocalypse? It is unreasonable to propose that one can define this concept and its relation to culture in too rigid a manner; an

approach to the myth of apocalypse must ultimately rely on typological analysis. Through this view, and through a reliance on interdependent methods, one can discover that definitions are not mutually exclusive, and a basic current of thought can be revealed to show how apocalypticism functions as theme. The study of apocalypticism in art must draw our attention to the insights of the post-structuralist and deconstructivist movements that are skeptical of synchronic readings of intellectual history by criticizing logocentric thought as a means of providing a coherent mastering of history. But it would be naive to undertake a discussion of a theme in art while attempting to divorce it totally from its social and ideological implications and to pretend that a reasonable conclusion cannot be drawn; while this paper is an examination of particular works rather than a foray into "art and society," its methods are deliberately reticulate rather than linear, exploratory and heuristic rather than demonstrative, so as to invite further applications of the works studied to a political and historical context. It must be stated at the outset that a cause-effect interpretation of apocalypticism's entry in artistic consciousness would repeat the inherent contradiction within, say, fundamentalism's use of religious literature for didactic purposes aimed at giving closure to experience. Because apocalyptic art is generated out of a particular cultural atmosphere, it is sensible to look at the forces at the origins of this consciousness. The world-view that grew out of this perspective reappears, in a more sophisticated form, in the American cinema.

There is little question that the Bible had a significant role in the formation of both religious and political consciousness in the early phase of the American civilizing experience. While the notion of millennium is present in most of the major religions as well as primitive

faiths (and, as will be demonstrated, takes on a transpsychical rather than specifically theological/historical complexion consistent with an understanding of apocalypse as myth), it is the New Testament and particularly St. John's Revelation that provide the foundation for the apocalyptic thinking that eventually influences American literature. The religious thinking of American Protestantism, particularly within the Puritan movement, was strongly apocalyptic and necessarily deterministic.⁶ Early descriptions of America in art and historical accounts were heavily couched in Biblical language that portrayed America as the Promised Land and millennial kingdom. This thinking was absolutely consistent with the Puritans'

strong dualism, their emphasis on retributive justice, their faith in the direct proportions of God's grace to success, their conviction that every detail of human reality is part of a historical pattern governed by God's will, their belief in the imminent end of the present age.⁷

While this thinking has precedents as far back as the Middle Ages,⁸ we find here the origins of apocalypticism as political belief in American society. Protestantism begins the divorce of apocalypse (derived from the Greek apokalypsis) from its own definition as revelation and from traditional Augustinian or Thomistic interpretation of eschatology. St. John's Revelation, in the mind of Thomistic Christianity, is meant both to provide a clearer sense of the concept of millennium throughout the Bible

⁶See Lois Parkinson Zamora, "The Myth of Apocalypse and the American Literary Imagination," in L.C. Zamora, ed., The Apocalyptic Vision in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on Art and Culture (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982). A significant work on this topic is James West Davidson, The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

⁷See Zamora's Introduction in The Apocalyptic Vision, p. 6.

⁸The most noteworthy scholarship is Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

and to offer a clear summation of the Christian notion of eschatology.⁹ This notion, simply stated, is intended to remind the individual of his or her temporality and of the transitory nature of history itself. The extremely complex and metaphoric language of Revelation (causing its outright rejection by the Orthodox Church) is meant to emphasize the return of Christ as a time that signals both the end of history and a moment when the meaning of the working of faith within history becomes clear. There is a certain reflexivity in Revelation in that the ornate language of the text is associated with complex, overwhelming, and baneful images of human history; the destruction of these elements signifies an end to man's fall into time which began the dependence on the apparatus of language. The end of history then signifies the union of the human collectivity with the consciousness of God and the disappearance of metaphor.

Above all, Revelation is not meant as prescriptive. By contrast, the apocalypticism of fundamentalist Protestantism views Revelation (and the rest of the Bible) in concretely prescriptive and prophetic terms. The apocalypse at the origins of Puritan belief is not only archaic and primitive, but profoundly determinist and pessimistic. The archaic aspect resides in the Protestant perception of God as anthropomorphic, and, although not capricious in the sense of the gods of antiquity, not as consubstantial with human consciousness as the God before the Reformation. Rather, fundamentalism develops a cataclysmic view of God's interaction with man based on a denial of the Thomistic conjunction of free will with

⁹See, for example, Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); and R.H. Charles, Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity (New York: Schocken Books, 1963).

divine grace, which situates divine presence in the operations of consciousness itself. A strong current of the Protestant tradition denies the efficacy of the individual action ("good works") and maintains a sense of the relationship of God to humanity as vertical and hierarchical, with the "elect" having a personal contract with God.

Hence, the literal approach to the language of the Bible is a denial of the efficacy of intellect and the belief that revelation, indeed the attainment of salvation, is an on-going process that forms a reciprocal contract between man and God. For the Protestant fundamentalist spirit, Revelation is a closed text devoid of metaphor. The Bible is a "secret code" of the end of history in the manner of the writings of Nostradamus; the faithful, who possess an intuitive or emotional rather than intellectual knowledge of divine will, see the millennium as a particular time in human history, predetermined and outside of human intervention. There is some continuity here with an equally ahistorical sense of the world being structured by the gods in sacred time; the cosmos exists apart from the gods in the profane time of being.¹⁰ Although fundamentalism certainly does not accept the primitive notion of the regeneration of time after certain cycles of history, there is in Protestantism the sense of the "tainted" nature of the historical world (due to its separation from the sacred realm of God) and the tendency to implant the notion of millennium regularly into interpretations of the secular world.

I will begin to elaborate in the first chapter how the hierarchical relationship of God to man resurrects the apocalyptic vision in the horror

¹⁰The key works here are Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), and Myth and Reality, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

film, beginning with Psycho. The belief in an omniscient power which the individual engages in a futile struggle has roots in Puritan thinking; the atmosphere of the present, which rejects Puritanism, nonetheless is unable (perhaps due to the constraints of ideology) to throw off this oppression, selecting an apocalypse that calls for destruction of self and society rather than the construction of a New Jerusalem that was part of American culture's earlier divinely-ordained utopian vision. Puritanism retains a foothold in the popular imagination, one that now seems once again to be moving back to the conscious level. This is not to suggest that Alfred Hitchcock nor any other director of the fantastic cinema uses the medium to express Puritan theology; the point is that the apocalypticism that keeps reappearing in the horror film, if it is to be explained at all, must be viewed in the context of past and present American thought. Puritanism is simply an early component of this thought.

The Puritan movement saw constant evidences within the natural world of God's displeasure with human weakness. At various points even the consciousness of evil was seen as a violation of humanity's contract with God.¹¹ The apocalypse within the horror film reveals well the chaos resulting from the imposition of this contract; films such as The Birds and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, as divergent as they may be, show this sacred contract transmuted into a period of cosmic evil, when the rigid belief system underlying American experience begins to turn in upon itself.

While the Calvinist spirit has been modified somewhat in the "born again" era of Protestant fundamentalism, it is still strongly in evidence.

¹¹A discussion of this theology is in Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 27-40.

The tendency of contemporary secular and religious thought to view history in cataclysmic and fatalistic terms helps us to understand the origins of the current pessimistic reading of apocalypse in fundamentalism. We discover, of course, the possibility of a synchronic reading of the spirit of apocalypse as a transpsychical mental structure that cuts across religions and cultures. The new resurgence of fundamentalism--evidenced only to a degree in the popularity of the books of Hal Lindsey¹² and TV evangelism--reveals once again not only the role of apocalypticism as collective myth but as a means of interpreting history that denies history, ideology, and the unconscious. The long involvement of American ideology with concepts of Manifest Destiny has often functioned to obscure specific political processes to the observer; indeed, it is because the apocalyptic view is anti-historical that discussions of the infrastructure of patterns of belief are avoided. When established political order fails, what occurs is the expectance of the retributive force of the "last days" that will focus revenge on the enemies of divine will, but also on those ineffectual in implementing this will.

The apocalyptic consciousness of the Puritans and early American art remains relevant to any discussion of the apocalyptic artwork of today, and is particularly relevant to the fantastic cinema of the 1970-80s. Most examinations of apocalypticism indicate that while St. John's Revelation is the key text referred to as a source of the apocalyptic image, it is Old Testament theology that provides the sensibility behind the calamity in apocalyptic expression, both inside and outside of art. The perception of evil as a power outside of human agency, the inability of the individual

¹² I refer chiefly to Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

to effect control over fate, and the sense of some overwhelming (often vague) supernatural force taking revenge on humanity, all refer to the theological influences outlined.

While the current cinema distances itself from most religious issues, its apocalypticism retains (and depends upon) this archaic sense of the human being's relationship to God and destiny. The horror film, even as it steadily ignores the supernatural, becomes the best representation of the hold of Old Testament moralism in popular culture, a hold enhanced by dominant ideology. The apocalypse of the horror film (at least from the time of Hitchcock's Psycho) has insisted on a "criticism of despair." Society is shown to be entering into or on the verge of calamity, but a way out of calamity is never in evidence. It is useless to learn from history; the power of love is extinct; social institutions have lost their mandate. The apocalyptic artwork momentarily "inoculates" (the term used by Barthes¹³) the spectator with criticism of a failing dominant order, but then reneges on this criticism by denying that there is any worth in carrying the critical process through to a conclusion. Despair and the wish-dream of destruction are strong characteristics of apocalypse, even with those artists grappling with the issues of transcendence and social transformation (David Cronenberg).

The notion of apocalypticism as a collective frame of mind going beyond specific interpretations of history (or theology) finds its most notable spokesmen in D.H. Lawrence and Frank Kermode. Lawrence and Kermode, while working from very different traditions and with different critical approaches, help to provide the modern audience with the sense

¹³Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), pp. 41-42.

of apocalypticism as a cultural force transcending particular readings offered by religion. Lawrence, entranced by Nietzsche and the paganism that found its way into British intellectual life after the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, asserted that

...the Apocalypse is for the non-individual side of a man's nature, written from the thwarted collective self, whereas meditation and unselfish service are for pure individuals, isolate. Pure Christianity anyhow cannot fit a nation, or society at large. The great war made it obvious. We can only fit individuals. The collective whole must have some other inspiration.¹⁴

Foremost is Lawrence's analysis of apocalypticism as a form of wish-fulfillment, a pessimistic spirit that pervaded intellectual life of the early part of this century outside of communities with no particular religious affiliations. Lawrence suggests apocalypticism as a psychic state transcending historical periods or fixations on specific images of Revelation. Ironically, Lawrence, an apostle of individualism, sees the Apocalypse appealing to the "thwarted collective self" representing a failed consensus. But Lawrence's individualism is closely tied to the Protestant belief in a personal and wholly metaphysical relationship with God (or "gods" in Lawrence's case). The Book of Revelation is at most a summary statement for the communion of Christianity, not a position paper on the "will of the people" that Lawrence holds in contempt. Lawrence concentrates on the appearance of an end-of-the-world belief system within marginal or disenfranchised classes. In modern society Lawrence's view seems incisive, as increasing sectors of the population, left and right, religious and secular, believe that civilization is on the wane. Religious fundamentalists believe this because of a perceived amorality spreading throughout

¹⁴D.H. Lawrence, Apocalypse (1931; reprint ed., New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 23.

society; liberal and progressive sectors (e.g., the environmentalist movement) hold the apocalyptic belief through the perception that nature and human society have been too long neglected by the inappropriate priorities of capitalism.¹⁵ What remains pertinent here is the belief in apocalypticism as a projection of a political attitude finding justification in religious tradition but that ultimately modifies or dispenses with this tradition altogether.

With Lawrence one can begin tracing the thread of a new, synchronic view of apocalypticism's role in belief. One can assume, in the post-structuralist environment, that the apocalyptic work is a "text" which, like all literature, is open and a repository for various cultural phenomena; we do not therefore have to enter the murky waters of impact or reflective theories of art in order to appreciate some sense of the artwork's relationship to society.

In many respects Frank Kermode anticipated some of the tendencies of post-structuralism when he began an interpretation of the myth of apocalypse both as a way by which humanity copes with the idea of an ending and as a way of projecting a specific teleology in the literary text.¹⁶ Kermode assumes that the business of creating fiction is a recognizable social enterprise; fiction and myth are tied, for Kermode, to man's general project of making sense of existence. Kermode states that myth is what happens to fictions

whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive....Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs for

¹⁵An interesting recent comment on current apocalypticism is Charles Krauthammer, "The End of the World," in The New Republic, 28 March 1983, p. 12.

¹⁶See Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for the absolute, fictions for conditional assent.¹⁷

Kermode suggests that apocalypse is a basic myth that, on a diachronic level, is a means of interpreting history, and on a synchronic level a way of projecting the individual's role in history by giving a specific design to the literary text. According to Kermode, the sense of an ending in the literary text provides a form of consolation and assists us in trying to "mitigate our existential anguish"¹⁸ by reinforcing the concept that the individual life is concurrent with a specific and significant chapter of history. Kermode suggests that the individual text reveals the need for history to come to an end as the individual life comes to an end; in literature we find that the "apocalyptic types--empire, decadence, and renovation, progress and catastrophe--are fed by history and underlie our ways of making sense of the world from where we stand, in the midst."¹⁹

Kermode is much more dispassionate than Lawrence in evaluating the myth of apocalypse as the foundation of a transpsychical wish-fulfillment in the collectivity. Whereas Lawrence uses apocalypticism (in a general attack on religion) to condemn what he perceives as a wish-dream of destruction within the spiteful and disenfranchised mob, Kermode sees apocalyptic consciousness as pervasive throughout history and possibly a stabilizing element in its ability to create order and collective belief. Kermode demonstrates, however, that apocalypticism is the product of delusory impulses within the psyche that find justification in religious texts and are reinforced as they find their way into literature. The fundamental

¹⁷Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 28.

delusion of apocalypse becomes more apparent as the myth itself becomes more current within modernism, even as religious or otherwise collective belief evaporates. Basic to Kermode's theory is that the notion of apocalypse is immanent rather than imminent to experience.²⁰ That is, apocalyptic thinking provokes the need to apprehend crisis, to pretend that man is regularly involved in processes of cataclysm and renewal while at the same time using the myth to escape from history (especially political reality) by suggesting the divinely-ordained and inevitable aspect of history that is beyond human authority. Contrary to what Lawrence might assert, there seems some obvious evidence here of the continuity of Western apocalyptic belief with religious ideas of primitive man. Mircea Eliade has demonstrated how primitive man, while bearing a cyclical rather than linear view of time, has a very similar sense of catastrophe that allows him to escape the "terror of history" while maintaining contact with sacred time.²¹ Eliade has discussed at some length primitive man's perception of a "fall into history" after the creation of the world in the sacred time of the gods;²² a view of cyclical cataclysm, including violent ritual that repeats the violence of creation, becomes a means by which humanity recapitulates cosmogony and assumes the renewal of time. While this belief is similar in spirit to the apocalypticism of Western society preventing man from becoming "overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of profane existence,"²³ it is more explicitly linked to a concept of regeneration. Out of the chaos

²⁰Ibid., p. 6.

²¹The concept is found in Eliade, Cosmos and History, pp. 141-162.

²²Ibid., pp. 91-92.

²³Ibid.

that results at the conclusion of one cycle of time is born fertility and creation. Although the cyclical notion of time has been incorporated into some Occidental theories of history, the pervasive sense of history in Judeo-Christian society remains linear, partially because of Western man's more developed concept of the infinite.

The basic concern for us in appreciating this synthesis of ideas is the understanding of how the myth of apocalypse, within most societies, provides a way of interpreting and responding to a given historical situation. Western society shares with primitive man apocalypticism as a collective belief and as a signifier of the breakdown of cohesion, the onset of societal chaos.

Apocalypticism thus forms patterns of ritual in all societies that signify the tendency within man to think in religious and ultimate terms at times of failure within the historical process. For reasons already described, the major current of apocalyptic belief in the West is largely pessimistic and contradictory. Rather than connect apocalypse directly with its definition as revelation at the end of the profane world, the principal emphasis is on a spirit of disaster that becomes a projection of collective revenge as well as suicide. Since apocalypse is ultimately outside the control of man, the sacred nature of the end of time becomes a way of acquiescing to the inefficacy of human action. Crisis becomes a means of making sense of and giving order to the world, but it is also a way of displacing responsibility by regarding extreme situations as predestined, supernatural, irrational, and demonic.

In this particular area, René Girard²⁴ provides useful insight and

²⁴René Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structures, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965). Especially interesting is Girard's chapter "The Dostoyevskian Apocalypse," pp. 256-289.

methodological approach by his fusion of structuralism and psychoanalysis in understanding how the apocalyptic temperament is manifest in the individual work of art. Psychoanalysis becomes important in recognizing the characteristics of apocalypticism as a phenomenon apart from specific religious traditions; indeed, Girard fills an important gap by showing how apocalypticism exists as a transpsychical condition, providing a theoretical foundation for Kermode's suggestion that apocalypse as projection is inscribed in the creation of literature due to its formation in collective belief.

In his discussion of the "mediation of desire," Girard notes that certain exaggerated and aberrant forms of human interchange, such as sadism and masochism, are based on a fixation within the subject on an unreachable, metaphysical ideal that reflects a negative self-image and is actually distant from the ostensible object of desire. Between masochism and sadism there exists a symbiotic relationship, since in both instances the subject recognizes as a model an image of power, oppression, and victimization that is a projection of guilt and inadequacy. The masochistic subject is never capable of autonomy; the acceptance of oppression becomes the acceptance of guilt and the aspiration toward the position of power. As Girard notes, the subject-object relationship is never direct, since the ideal mediating image remains suspended between the two as the real fixation of the subject's desire. Since the image is always unattainable it has a god-like quality, but it is certainly not God in any Judeo-Christian sense since it does not provide a "vanishing point" and allow the incorporation of spiritual presence into an autonomous Self.

What becomes clear in Girard is the way by which the subject's exaggerated mediator of desire causes him to conceive of himself as either

God or devil as his self-image fluctuates back and forth in the subject-object relationship without allowing a recognition of how the mediating image disturbs reasonable participation in the real world. The apocalypse comes with a dissolution of the mediating image without the subject's full reintegration into authentic experience (cataclysm without revelation), or when the subject feels that his condition is transpsychical: in the master-slave mechanism of masochism, this would set up a hopeless climate of alienation where people are "recognized" insofar as they view the subject as contemptible, a condition Girard points to in Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* (whose situation will be discussed later in relationship to Taxi Driver). A film such as Taxi Driver, which incorporates important elements of the horror film and other genres, follows on Girard's idea of the extreme mediating image that tends to dissolve itself and destroy the perceiving subject. What is apparent in this type of film provides a link between modern American apocalypticism and the theory of mediating desire/aspiration. What is obvious in the American apocalypse is the wish for catastrophe because a divinely-ordained sense of "mission" is seen as betrayed, calling for the revenge of God. This feeling, which removes any serious discussion of Self or the formation of collective belief, is especially obvious in the horror films that tend to debunk the idea of a sense of mission as divine mediating image. The emphasis on the collapse of consensus and the end of the "hero" is evidence in modern film of the kind of situation where the mediating image betrays the subject that Girard finds central to literature.

Complementary to Girard's thesis and equally useful to an appreciation of the current wave of apocalypticism in the horror film is

Freud's notion of repetition-compulsion.²⁵ Most of the films under consideration here--from The Texas Chainsaw Massacre to Rosemary's Baby to Dawn of the Dead to Taxi Driver and Apocalypse Now--all contain an element of repetition, an impulse toward the death instinct, as part of their apocalypse. Freud analyses repetition as a means by which the individual avoids "remembering" and wards off confrontations with pathology by the continued unconscious immersion in the destructive activity that signifies illness.

The need to repeat self-destructive behavior (rather than consciously "remember" the source of a problem) often creates in the mind of the subject the sense of being manipulated by a vengeful and unfeeling God, a force outside of human control. Travis Bickle's repetition in Taxi Driver, explainable primarily through Girard's thesis of the mediation of desire, creates an exaggerated sense of self that eventually calls for self-destruction. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Dawn of the Dead deal with parodies of repetitive behavior in American rural life and consumer culture respectively, suggesting that the accretion of satisfaction leads to an imploding void. Coppola's Apocalypse Now suggests another level of repetition that reflects back upon practically all of the films discussed: the repetition of failing ritual suggesting the disappearance of myth, collective belief, and the spiritual bankruptcy of a culture. This repetition may be viewed as a deconstruction of primitive repetition of the cosmogony studied by Eliade; the horror represented in Apocalypse Now concerns the inability of ritual to escape history and to draw society to-

²⁵Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. James Strachey (London: Liveright Books, 1924). Bruce Kavin undertakes a useful discussion of repetition as applied to film and literature in Telling it Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

gether.

René Girard's scholarship becomes important at various points of this work in assisting in the development of a coherent view of the apocalyptic cinema. Girard's more recent criticism suggests not only the great influence of cultural anthropology but his return to a more traditional structuralism.²⁶ Girard's discussion of the "sacrificial crisis," i.e., the chaos that appears when ritual fails, is important in explaining the societal chaos expressed by the apocalyptic cinema and will be used in the arguments of several chapters.

We discover, then, a series of overarching and compatible concepts that supply a unifying view of the apocalypse in the horror film. At the risk of sounding facetious, I might offer a proviso about attempting a theory of the horror film's apocalypse. The cynicism of this type of film is geared toward refusing explanation; the apocalypse does not have to do with providing clarity and a revelation of history's purpose. It is concerned with showing civilization at a dead end, but more importantly with exposing the worthlessness of any totalizing system of belief.

III

I will assert that a sense of crisis and the unrecuperability of society are the chief characteristics of the modern horror film's apocalypse; however, a typological approach rather than the forced imposition of a particular thesis will form the methodological framework.

Chapter I introduces the characteristics of the apocalyptic horror film with a brief discussion of two pivotal works, Hitchcock's Psycho and

²⁶René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

The Birds. These films will be analyzed in regard to their relevance to the steady increase in apocalyptic fixations in other film genres from the 1960s onward. I will argue that the attempt at a massive critique of American society constituting the apocalyptic cinema has strong roots in the perspective of Hitchcock's two horror films.

Chapter II begins a discussion of the apocalyptic work as expression of accelerating crisis in society and looks to three recognized directors of the modern horror film (Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, and David Cronenberg) for variations on the nature of this crisis. The chapter points out the tense sacred/profane dialectic that the horror film contains as it deals with the breakdown of myth and shared consensus, the dissolution of belief in the sacred, and the theme of barbaric regression as a metaphor for the absolute failure of the American civilizing experience.

Chapter III focuses on the demonic possession cycle (Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist, etc.) to show the horror film's approach to the traditional Biblical narrative of the appearance of evil manifest on earth as a demon, signalling the onset of chaos. The chapter will show that apocalypse as projection remains constant in these films, including those that endorse the idea of the devil as an objective entity. I will propose that the demonic possession film uses the image of the devil as a means of displacing internal violence, a concept discussed in anthropology. The real crux of the crisis revealed by this film, however, is its inability to dispense with the supernatural while trying at points to use the devil as a symbol of societal dysfunction. Although the demonic possession film is often "radical" in its suggestion of the unrecuperability of society, it nevertheless tends toward recuperation by displacing evil in a demonic scapegoat.

Chapter IV deals with the city as important iconography of the horror film as it is used as the "City of Man," the traditional locus for the apocalyptic event. The films discussed in this chapter (Escape from New York, Mad Max, Dawn of the Dead, Taxi Driver) are significant for two reasons: their apocalypse is involved in the total destruction of the commercial/consumer world and, more importantly, in a deconstruction of genre film conventions to show the paucity of the contemporary myths supporting these conventions, and indeed the inability of society to share any collective belief.

Chapter V concentrates on two films on the fringes of the genre that articulate in some detail the characteristics of the crises described in the previous chapters. Peter Weir's The Last Wave is important in that a large part of what qualifies it as a work of the fantastique also makes it involved in an investigation of the specific spiritual crisis provoking apocalypse. Francis Coppola's Apocalypse Now is examined for the way it expresses very well the apocalypse of civilization found in earlier American art by its dependence on the conventions of various genres, especially the horror film. The concern of this chapter is with the "death of myth" as a notion forming the principal characteristic of apocalyptic cinema. By so doing the chapter will re-evaluate apocalypse in terms of the collapse of collective belief as this notion is elucidated by Lévi-Strauss. I will discuss Lévi-Strauss's ideas as they illuminate the horror film's variation on the traditional theme of apocalypse in art and how this variation becomes involved ultimately in destroying the myth-making capacities of art.

This work is not designed as a comprehensive genre study. It attempts to examine a strain of thought that is rapidly dominating one genre and showing some impact on others. The films chosen for exami-

nation can be said to be "representative" works not for their critical or commercial success (although most of the films herein have enjoyed both) but for their distinct and easily identifiable apocalyptic themes. The analyses will show constant mindfulness of the relation of the apocalypticism described here to that which appears visible in other genres and in the mainstream cinema.

The methodology of this investigation, since the work constitutes a typology, will be transformalist, interdisciplinary, and will incorporate the contemporary approaches of comparative literature studies. In the post-structuralist critical environment it seems inappropriate, particularly given our concern here for perceiving an intellectual current that is very much in the process of development, to approach the task with a closed method. At the same time it would be equally naive to assume that film is created in a social or cultural vacuum. The approach of the deconstructivist school and the notion of intertextuality obviate, it seems to me, concerns over "impact" or "reflective" theories of art.²⁷ My chief ambition here is to analyze specific films, not to deal with the nature of film's relation to the audience nor the role of industry in the production of films. If one assumes a certain ideological framework, such considerations are not necessary or worthwhile to this type of study. We must be conscious, however, that the films to be examined simply cannot be viewed

²⁷It seems to me that John G. Cawelti, a significant voice in the criticism of American "popular culture," has labored unnecessarily over this issue. The subject still of the most controversy is the ability of the artwork to impact on mass society (an issue of some concern in the debate within contemporary journalism over the impact of television or pornography on certain social groupings); it appears that such debates are single-minded in their limiting of the issues addressed, and frequently naive or ill-informed in their lack of any genuine political analysis. This is most apparent when Cawelti labels as simply determinist Marxist or Freudian methodologies. See Cawelti's Adventure, Mystery and Romance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

as discrete "works" since their contents evidence an enormous amount of traces from other films and from various elements of contemporary culture. Because the idea of apocalypse has its origin in cultural belief, some attention must be paid to the extent that a film either embodies, reinforces, or rejects this belief, and the extent to which the film "answers" dominant culture.

At various points the term "deconstruction" is used and some provisions need to be made regarding its use. I am not concerned here primarily with the theory of language and interpretation developed by Jacques Derrida and others. Instead, my use of the term will generally refer to a particular film's tendency not only to become self-reflexive but to unmask its own codes and to violate deliberately narrative conventions of meaning and closure; as it so happens what is going on within the genre of the fantastique coincides to a strong degree with the ambition Derrida et al. set for criticism. In fact, one phase of contemporary apocalypticism seems to be the subversion of narrative closure, which appears the reversal of its earlier impulses in literature as discussed by Frank Kermode.²⁸ I have already referred to Lévi-Strauss as a source to explain how the particular deconstruction in contemporary genre film is involved either in showing the death of myth or its devaluation in the contemporary setting. Jonathan Culler has remarked that

...to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise.²⁹

²⁸I will refer on numerous occasions throughout this paper to Kermode, The Sense of an Ending.

²⁹Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 86.

I will argue that the horror film and a sector of the fantastic cinema (and important parts of mainstream cinema) are engaged in a form of deconstruction. The deconstruction undertaken by the artwork itself is not really part of a critical, analytical process. Instead, the deconstruction that is part of the horror film's apocalypse is involved, oddly, in proving Lévi-Strauss's argument about how myths die as they are transformed into romance. By constantly loading up, reworking, or holding up for ridicule not only conventions of genre art but certain assumptions of American middle-class society, the horror film suggests the bankruptcy of society and also of art in helping to generate a new mythic language expressive of the consensus of the population. Because the horror film is apocalyptic, its deconstruction does not exemplify the analytic, sometimes ideologically-oriented atmosphere of post-structuralist criticism. Rather, it expresses the anguish Lévi-Strauss, Girard, and others suggest about societies that lose their mythic language. One can say quite literally that the apocalyptic cinema shows unmitigated despair at man being cut off from God, cursed to remain mired in the repetition of dead ritual.

A final comment on the paper's methodological orientation. The transformalist approach to the films chosen for analysis will implement and synthesize distinct methods as they are useful to discover particular levels of meaning that could not be revealed as fruitfully by a more rigid and deterministic method. The general tendency of the interdisciplinary approach is to show a cohesion not only among particular themes addressed but also among investigative methods. Ideological and anthropological methods, for example, should be shown to be complementary. Criticism has benefited from the post-structuralist atmosphere, which has called attention to methodological monomania and the tendency of other-

wise useful ideological and psychoanalytic approaches to justify Marx or Freud rather than explain particular works and their relationship to each other.

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a typological approach to a predominant idea in a popular film genre so as to provide a springboard for further investigation of the idea's aesthetic, social, and ideological implications. To achieve this the critical method used will rely on a careful examination of a given film's themes, with citation of specific evidence from the film's text, rather than simple visual analysis that is frequently associated with cinema studies. The concentration on the image itself and on the specific "language" of film alone cannot serve my purposes here nor can it be seen as compatible with the goals of comparative studies. The establishment of cinema as a specialized language has the capacity, it seems to me, of compartmentalizing and fetishizing the discipline rather than opening it up to a broader intellectual forum. This is not to suggest that I am undercutting the integrity of film as a unique art form nor is it to ignore film's particular mode of communication or the materiality of the medium. In writing this paper I am assuming that film specialists already are well-versed in and appreciate film as a form unto itself, and that students from other areas (particularly literature) will find this writing accessible and be disposed to incorporate further analyses of film into their own intellectual pursuits.

Sufficient material has been published to demonstrate the cinema as the most influential, most socially important medium of our time. Criticism of film genres has focused particularly on cinema as a reflective medium, since certain genres tend to enjoy tremendous success with the public. Considering the acceptance and durability of the horror genre

(it has outdistanced other genres, such as the Western) and the apparently positive response to apocalypse as a genre theme, it is worthwhile to investigate more deeply the success of horror film as cultural phenomenon. This is not the motivation of this study, however. My principal interest is the horror film as apocalyptic art. The films chosen for study contain, I believe, enough traces of an earlier sensibility, enough ideas and images, to warrant their categorization as compelling representations of the continuing apocalyptic tradition. Certainly other media show strong evidences of apocalypticism (the novel, popular music, etc.), but my faith is that no medium has cinema's accessibility nor its status in influencing popular consciousness. While this study will not develop new theories of film, nor use very much of film's technical language, it will not equivocate on cinema as the primary art medium of the century.

CHAPTER I

THE MYTH OF APOCALYPSE AND THE
HORROR FILM: THE PRIMACY OF
PSYCHO AND THE BIRDS

There is compelling evidence that American genre films underwent a profound change in the 1960s, a change that indicated an accentuation of the apocalyptic spirit. For example, the Western, the genre most concerned with celebrating the American civilizing experience, gradually became extinct. Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch, released at the close of the decade and at the height of the Vietnam War, has come to be regarded as the quintessential "last" Western for its summary statement on the end of a distinct period of American life. A key motif of The Wild Bunch is the setting sun; this, combined with the extreme violence of the film's ending, suggests that an older way of life (viewed with nostalgia) must be obliterated totally (taking the guilty and the innocent) since it cannot be recuperated.¹

Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde shares similar assumptions if on a more modified level. The nostalgia of this film is interwoven with the theme of the death of innocence and the failure of a rather vague ideal vision. Bonnie and Clyde are an attractive if misguided young couple, brutally murdered from ambush as they drive through rural America;

¹The most comprehensive writings on Peckinpah are Jim Kitses, Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah: Studies of Authorship within the Western (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); and Paul Seydor, Peckinpah: The Western Films (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

the parallels with the Kennedy years, with the mood that this administration engendered, and with the shock of the JFK assassination are deliberately unmistakable.² The apocalypse of this film, like Peckinpah's, resides in its acceptance of the inevitability of defeat. Bonnie and Clyde's success with the youth movement of the 1960s supports such a claim. Bonnie and Clyde helped advance a non-political view of the nature of the opposition; the oppressed are necessarily victims, and the only solution in the face of an implacable enemy is death. The film projects a view of its characters as martyrs precisely because they accede to this concept. Where Bonnie and Clyde differs from The Wild Bunch is in its belief that the victim is ultimately too weak to effect the enemy's destruction while bringing about his own.

These films are significant because their apocalypticism stresses the inevitability of failure based on a flaw that makes the individual will incompatible with society. This flaw is not defined along traditional tragic lines, but instead represents a simple rejection of certain assumptions in earlier American cinema (Ford) about the value of the community. Still, these works are concerned more with misplaced dreams than fundamental defects of human civilization. The unrecuperability of society would be dealt with by the fantastique; the precedents to be cited are Hitchcock's Psycho and The Birds, but a discussion of these works must be prefaced by a comment on the incipient apocalypticism long evident in the horror film.

Most students of horror and science-fiction would no doubt look

²Arthur Penn has remarked: "We even had a piece of his [Warren Beatty's] head fly off, just like in the famous film of Kennedy being shot." See Curtis Lee Hanson, "An Interview with Arthur Penn," Cinema 3:5 (Summer 1967):12.

to the latter for evidence of the apocalyptic sensibility and the "imagination of disaster."³ Obviously many of the science-fiction films of the 1950s support that view, but in fact few if any of them address problems deeply rooted in human psychology or the constitution of civilization. Rather, the more famous "Armageddon movies" or monster epics of the post-war years (War of the Worlds, Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, Godzilla, etc.) are involved with the failure of technology or with concerns that could be explained with reference to the political/racial milieu--Invasion of the Body Snatchers, with its interconnections with the Cold War, is a good example. What is significant here is that the crises befalling society as depicted in science-fiction are indeed explainable without penetrating analysis of social or economic systems. More important, society is most often depicted as recuperable in science-fiction, even after total devastation has taken place. This optimism places most of past science-fiction within the more comfortable mainstream of American genre cinema.

By contrast, the horror film has not only co-opted the role of science-fiction in responding to social concerns, but has done so with a critical eye focused on more than discrete issues of current society. The horror film has long since cut many of its ties to the Gothic novel, Romanticism, and the conventions of early horror films (e.g., those produced by Universal and Hammer) in order to assume this new posture. This transition is not unusual--the novel Frankenstein has, after all, been interpreted as a forerunner of both horror and science-fiction.⁴ At the same

³See Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," Against Interpretation (New York: Delta Books, 1966), p. 209.

⁴The importance of Frankenstein to both genres is demonstrated in Darko Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); and George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, eds., The Endurance of

time the horror film has seldom been recognized as a genre annotating sweeping political/social problems.

Generally, the horror film is thought to deal with properties of the unconscious mind, and to draw its power from marshaling nightmare imagery connecting to individual mental life.⁵ Unlike art movements such as Surrealism, however, the horror film's function in exposing the workings of the unconscious mind seldom served as overt social critique, largely because of the incredible nature of the genre's content (psychoanalytic or political readings of Frankenstein and Dracula have seldom been accessible to the mass audience).

It is nonetheless obvious that the horror film has inherited the apocalyptic current of American literature but in so doing has become disconnected from traditional religious belief. It has also formed a critique of society using a multivalent textual apparatus. In brief, the horror film has begun a process of unmasking its own conventions while offering a powerful critique of fundamental assumptions of much American art, including concepts such as "human nature" heretofore treated as self-evident and sacrosanct by all genres. While undertaking this critique the horror film has refused to adopt any programmatic response, to accept a critical method or admit to any system of causality in describing the apocalypse; although some films (the work of George Romero) contain allegories of consumer culture or corporate evil, the chief concern of this apocalypse is with a collective failure that cannot be reversed.

"Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

⁵Ernest Jones's On the Nightmare (London: Liveright Books, 1971) has become important in applications of psychoanalytic method to criticisms of the fantastique.

Whereas the early horror film contained a "demon" (mummy, vampire, werewolf, ghoul) on whom violence could be displaced, the current phase of the genre has dispensed with most monsters in order to make the issue of pathology both transparent and transpsychical. The current device of psychopath-as-monster both reduces the individual to an object for examination and upsets audience expectations about the localization and displacement of evil. The horror film's more conscious awareness of psychoanalysis has made its plots less concerned with terrible but discrete incidents and more involved in describing a transpsychical crisis. To be sure, this characteristic is present in some allegorical features of early horror, including Edgar Ulmer's The Black Cat (1934), which relies on an expansive notion of evil arising out of cultural turmoil; in Ulmer's film a close equation is made between paganism within a decadent aristocracy and the ravages of war produced by a class system (the devil worshipper's chateau is built on the graves of World War I). With this work, however, the recuperability of society is still emphasized, even as hero and villain both descend into barbarism and madness.

In two pivotal works of the 1960s the belief in the recuperability of society begins to disappear. Psychoanalysis becomes one tool used by the horror film to describe the presence of an evil age overtaking all experience; this evil age is indeed similar to the Hindu kali yuga⁶ in its description of an approaching apocalypse based on recognizable disintegration within the human community rather than the capricious displeasure

⁶See Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 113-14, passim. The concept of the kali yuga in relation to Western apocalypse is discussed in John R. May, Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970).

of a wrathful God. Although the landmark importance of Psycho to the apocalyptic horror film is deflated slightly by the intervention of the psychiatrist (repeating the role of the horror film's Van Helsing-style scientist) and the resultant closure this scene provides the film, almost every scene serves to subvert conventional notions of what American society is and what a work of art should represent.

II

Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho (1960) cannot be overemphasized as a prologue to the rise of the apocalyptic temperament in cinema, and to the privileged position of the horror film in describing apocalypse in the ensuing twenty years after this film's release. The first authentic horror film of Hitchcock's career (there is only one other--The Birds), Psycho can be viewed as a prelude to the cultural anxiety that grew with the political assassinations of the 1960s, escalating and seemingly random domestic violence, the Vietnam War, the Watergate affair and the adjacent breakdown of consensus which in turn engendered a new interest in cataclysm that quickly became evidenced in art. This way of viewing Psycho's importance of course ignores an interpretation that would see the film as a repository not only of many existent genre conventions but of a number of various strains of cultural assumption that predated the film. Hitchcock's choice of a particular locale and time of the day for the film's action to begin (Phoenix--2:43 P.M.) and his decision to portray the Janet Leigh character as a "perfectly ordinary bourgeois,"⁷ suggests an attempt to unravel some principal assumptions of American middle-class

⁷Francois Truffaut, Hitchcock (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 211.

life and to show a general psychopathology simmering underneath the superstructure of these assumptions.

The classic opening of the film, which selects the city of Phoenix and then a particular bedroom window to locate the narrative, has the function of instilling a sense of arbitrariness in the construction of the actual narrative that unfolds. This establishing shot, viewed in retrospect, has a metadocumentary, "you are there" quality that suggests--quite consciously on the director's part--that the pathology we eventually see in Norman Bates has its causes in some fundamental aspects of American experience. While the swerve in the film's plot from a tale of stolen money and a woman's frustrated love life to one of psychological aberration and murder might still be viewed by audiences simply as part of the filmmaker's decision to upset genre conventions and audience expectations, there is no way one can avoid the ultimate recognition of the causal links between the two plots, and it would be foolish to assert that the "first" plot is simply a red herring to provide a premise for the "gimmick" of the famous shower sequence.

The difficult interconnections between the erotic drive, the Puritan ethic, and the demands of capitalism are established in Psycho in such a way as to form a sense of "desire" quite in keeping with the most recent psychoanalytic and post-structuralist cultural investigations. There is little overstatement here, since Hitchcock goes about this narrative in a way that continually reveals itself to be systematic.⁸

The frustration and confinement that form the bleak atmosphere of the film is established in the furtive affair between Sam Loomis and

⁸A good introduction is James Naremore, Filmguide to "Psycho" (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

Marion, the tenderness of which is quickly deflated by the puritanical constraints of Marion's life and the dismal financial legacy Sam inherits from his father. We are immediately forced to recognize the burden of the past weighing down on all the characters of the film. The film does not propose any specific causal ties between sexual frustration and crime, and it would no doubt be less successful if it attempted such connections. It is precisely in the way in which the film shows how people are motivated by unconscious drives, unable to perceive the operation of ideology in personal interchange, that Psycho is a compelling depiction of middle-class existence. Film scholarship has already paid considerable attention to Psycho's reflexive aspect and its tendency to subvert not just audience expectations but audience belief that it remains distant from the ideas preoccupying film. What has not been clearly established is that the film's attempt to incorporate the viewer as voyeur/victim cannot be read simply as a clever visual device or intellectual conceit, regardless of authorial intentionality; if we as spectators accept the role of voyeur along with Norman Bates, we accept, at the least, the alienation associated with this pathology and the conclusions psychological/ideological criticism might draw not only about the nature of spectacle but about the social conditions that engender fascination. It is not misleading to suggest that Psycho, of all Hollywood films, aspires most to be a mirror of its audience.

The case of Psycho as a critique of an entire society is made stronger in retrospect by a study of the iconographic and textual links among all the characters. Marion's white brassiere, an early symbol of her frustrated desire (and a reminder of a restrictive production code) takes on amplified significance in describing the situation of the characters

when we get to see the inside of Norman's house, with his mother's drab Victorian wardrobe, the bronze cast of folded hands on a dresser, and Norman's own bedroom, where male sexuality regresses to the infantile and masturbatory. The very structure of the Bates house (whose style is actually termed California Gothic⁹ and is unmistakably a reminder of a Puritan heritage and the burden of the old world), with its Bachelardian stratification (repression hidden in fruit cellar and attic), suggests the illness within American Gothic and the new pathology it gives rise to in the "total system" of the motel and automobile culture of the present, the culture that impacts on Marion. We are forced at last to recognize Norman as an extreme but lawful consequence of behavior that continues universally in everyday life, an idea supported by the duplication--at some level or other--of many of Norman's actions by other characters early in the film in such a way as to preface his actions for us, especially as we consider the film in retrospect.

The statement by the overbearing Cassidy that Marion's boss "should air condition [her] up" has a deliberately erotic/sadistic tone underlined by Marion's cavalier treatment by Lowery and Cassidy. Marion and Sam have a masochistic fixation on the gaze, born out of guilt, that is very similar to Norman's relationship to his wide-eyed stuffed owls, the ever-present dominance of the mother, and his need to turn his guilt into sadism. Sam snidely suggests that he and Marion "turn mother's picture to the wall" before they make love, a suggestion that upsets Marion, who is also dominated by the presence of a dead mother. Marion looks up with a certain contempt as Cassidy attempts to flirt with her from

⁹Truffaut, Hitchcock, p. 205.

a perch slightly above her desk; Cassidy's brandishing of money as a weapon of authority with which he will buy happiness for his "little girl" helps Marion to commit her crime out of a feeling of resentment rather than greed.

As with Norman, Marion's guilt seems to propel her further into repetition, exaggerating her self-importance almost to the point of narcissism, as when she imagines the vendetta Lowery and Cassidy are planning as she flees the scene of the crime and when she panics on being discovered by the highway patrolman.

Marion and Norman Bates are tied together by a bond of guilt, and guilt along with a necessary divine retribution become characteristics of the apocalyptic cinema all the way to Taxi Driver. The concept of the gaze, an element emphasized in recent descriptions of Hitchcock,¹⁰ can be understood in the apocalyptic context. The patrolman's one-way impenetrable gaze, the early shot of Marion supine under Sam's upright figure, Lowery and Cassidy watching Marion as she is seated in the office, even the shower head in the Bates Motel, all emphasize Marion's guilt and helplessness, feelings that precede her actual crime and continue after she acknowledges her crime as an attempt to escape to a "private island" (suggesting that the robbery was not meant to make possible a life with Sam but to permit a rejection of society). If we read the shower head as another of the film's "eye motifs" (as William Rothman suggests), some concentration must be focused on it as the last image Marion sees before her vicious murder. If it is the final hypostatization of her guilt, this eye of God produces the "great rain" of retribution that becomes part of

¹⁰See William Rothman, Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Travis Bickle's wish-fulfillment. Norman's guilt is an even more exaggerated extension of Marion's, with the all-seeing eyes of his stuffed birds prefiguring the furies of The Birds in their representation of a terror internalized that will burst forth not in purgation but self-destruction. The Gothic homestead towers in the background, actually an empty carcass but for Norman a seat of divine power that dominates his every gesture. A good example is when Norman runs up to his house apparently to "tell off" his mother and assert his independence after his sex urge has been awakened by the sight of Marion's nudity. He stops short as he enters the house, standing alone, intimidated, at the bottom of the staircase, as if this were a stairway to the throne of God. Ironically, it is only when Marion confronts Norman, the most diseased member of the society in which she is involved, that she undergoes an anagnorisis and starts to reverse her situation. The fact that Marion is nonetheless murdered suggests that neither she nor the society that produced her is recuperable.

A more detailed analysis (and there have been many) of Psycho's images can only develop this film's indictment of a general condition and the vaguely-hedged pessimism about the consequences of this condition. We cannot help but notice that the action moves from Phoenix into Southern California, the borders of the frontier, and the sense of the now-limited expanses of the American landscape are evident at various points, e.g., the Remington-style canvas in Lowery's chintzy, sweltering office, and the general motif of flight, search and rescue. A very drastic closing down of the frontier is visible in Lila's discovery of Mrs. Bates. The movement of the film is steadily downward and inward, away from the feeling of daylight, abundance and expanse (also evident at the start

of The Birds) to a nightmarish claustrophobia that exteriorizes the unconscious mind. Lila's entry into the fruit cellar and her first sighting of Mrs. Bates are sequences more unnerving than the punchline of the mummified corpse itself. The cellar, bathed in the harsh, high-contrast light of a single naked bulb, seems apart from the rest of the dwelling, possibly because this is an image not comfortably associated with expectations of the middle-class home, even one that is a relic of the last century. The jugs, baskets, casks, shelves, and slatwork surrounding Mrs. Bates are as much part of a petrified history as the corpse in the antique chair. But what makes this setting so disturbing? The convention of the cellar in the Gothic genre is well-known, as is the cellar as architectural component corresponding to stratification in the unconscious mind (i.e., the cellar as repressed anxieties, the attic as stored dreams). Other ideas circulate during Lila's exploration, however. The long black shelves to the left of the door recall concentration camp bunks so familiar from documentary footage, and how far is the black-and-white realization of this image and the rest of the Bates house from the TV version of "I Remember Mama" and the 1950s media presentation of the bourgeoisie (Psycho was first intended as a teleplay)? So the film's expansiveness is also on the micro level, detailing the universality of pathology and societal collapse in the single image's capturing the interconnections of the film with a morbid history of repressive Western culture.

The expansiveness of the film's central concerns are evident also in the title: Psycho reflects the transmogrification of scientific language into a jargon that represents a certain pervasive distrust of psychoanalysis and the tendency to deny the existence of the unconscious mind. (It is noteworthy how popular genres of the 1960s and '70s have established

the "psycho" as demon and as member of a criminal class although little or no attention is paid to the causative factors behind the appearance of a host of "crazies" in the popular consciousness that fosters this art.) It has already been established that the title, as jargon, seems deliberately unspecific in suggesting a reference to a person or a general condition.

As suggested, Hitchcock's decision to conclude the film with the speech of the psychiatrist has the effect of narrowing the scope of the work. On one level the speech might be seen as the introduction of the device of the escolio (such as seen in Borges) to expose the narrative and make it more self-reflexive. Certainly the speech makes the story much more obviously concerned with psychopathology, but at the same time it makes it more concerned with Norman Bates alone. Without this scene the film might be obscure to an audience (certainly less so for audiences of today), but with a less explanatory ending there would likely be a far stronger suggestion that the disease represented by Norman's case is not containable and is actually overcoming the entire society. The final image of the film--the dissolve of Norman's death's head grin into the salvaging of Marion's car from the swamp--has a most devastating sense. The surfacing of the car from the mud undercuts the psychiatrist's glibness, and this bleak sign is bolstered by the terminal state of Norman's illness; the latter is reinforced by the sophisticated integration of the last image of Norman and that of the car. The salvaging of the car may state, on a more literal level, the forced confrontation with the consequences of a situation long since out of hand.

It is not stretching the point to call Psycho an apocalyptic work; we must make a case for this at least because of the premises now visible

in the film and its relationship to a broad cinematic current to follow, and for the articulation of apocalypse we come to recognize in other, more recent films. The films of the 1960s and '70s show that Psycho was the progenitor of a new apocalyptic tradition, a premise confirmed by the way the impulses of the film were given a more spectacular and devastating elaboration in Hitchcock's next project, The Birds (1963).

After introducing psychoanalysis into the horror film to create a very expansive metaphor, Hitchcock subverts this in The Birds to rely on an allegorical apparatus that proposes the "cosmic" nature of social disaster and the failure of interchange. The Birds reflects, it would seem, a distrust for the empirical, scientific solutions evident (at least according to criticism) in his earlier films and a general sense of the ingenious that pervades his work. It might be a temptation to say that Hitchcock turned a corner with this film and that The Birds may force one to reevaluate his career. In fact, however, Hitchcock's later films were unremarkable and formulaic; it is not, after all, our purpose here to establish anything about Hitchcock, but rather to suggest that The Birds helped set a precedent for an artistic style perhaps beyond the ken of the individual artist.

The birds of Hitchcock's film are Furies that bring wrath (not justice) to a small-minded and hysterical community. What ties The Birds to the apocalypticism of the modern horror film is its general dismissal of mystical/metaphysical elements of the genre while at the same time depending heavily on elements of myth and cultural ritual to explain society's disintegration. If psychoanalysis is the primary tool for understanding Psycho, the metalanguage of The Birds suggests structural anthropology and mythopoeics along with psychoanalysis to have a sense

of the film's assault on the empty systems of belief of bourgeois society.

In iconology birds have been interpreted as representing demons, and, in literary tradition and psychoanalytic criticism, the turbulent aspects of the unconscious mind.¹¹ In The Birds the female principle is represented by the birds' attack; the screeching, capricious, wildly destructive bird assaults are coordinated with evidence of the rapid collapse of a hysterical, largely matriarchal society. The action of the film is centered on three women--a possessive mother (Lydia Brenner), a spurned girlfriend (Annie Hayworth), and an unbalanced career girl (Melanie Daniels)--whose personal entanglements and feud over a man (Mitch Brenner) are eventually shown to reflect a kind of general disruption in the small community of Bodega Bay. As the narrative develops we understand that Bodega Bay is a microcosm of society. The action moves from a large, cosmopolitan city--San Francisco, perhaps the most liberal and sophisticated West Coast city--to a small, rural community in the manner of Psycho. As in Psycho, the heroine's flight from the city suggests a form of escape, only with Melanie Daniels the flight involves more of a capricious escape from ennui than an act of desperation to secure love and peace of mind. The Birds reminds us, as did Psycho, that the American rural settlement was the original repository of frustration and neurosis before America closed its borders and built its cities. Unlike Norman Bates, Mitch Brenner is a healthy individual fully integrated into the community; he is seemingly able to live with his clinging mother and a sister not half his age without showing any lack of self-esteem or internalizing resentment. At the same time Mitch's integration in the community

¹¹ See, for example, James Hillman, The Dream and the Underworld (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 148, 150.

has the effect of disturbing it; as a well-to-do lawyer his presence suggests the "gentrification" of the town and the disruption of the simple values of a working class settlement. This is underscored with the arrival of Melanie Daniels, who in a short while provokes the xenophobia in the town. Marion Crane's paranoia is explained in the character of Melanie Daniels; the hysterical mother in the seaside restaurant explicitly labels Melanie as "evil" and the irrationality of her accusation, although decried by Mitch and the others, is apparent in almost all interaction. The eventual isolation of Melanie and the Brenner family confirms them as scapegoats, not quite arbitrarily selected, who help displace the evil of the town itself.¹² The breakdown of consensus in the town is also obvious in the restaurant scene. Mrs. Bundy, the bird expert who poo-poops the idea of the attacks, speaks with an authoritative voice, but as a representative of the intelligentsia she is viewed as a crackpot or as little more than a curiosity. Sholes, the roughneck fisherman, is complacent about the attacks; his chief regard is bringing in his boats. Mitch says Sholes is "a man people listen to," but Sholes shrugs off the suggestion that he help organize Bodega Bay. The middle-class businessman who orders a scotch has a solution: "Get yourself some guns, kill 'em all.... messy animals"; his impotent bravado and stupidity are punctuated as he incinerates himself. Hitchcock relies on the convention of the fool for the word of truth; a SeanO'Casey-style drunk raises his glass and says "It's the end of the world!"

The Birds is unique in its unqualified assault on causality, a

¹²The concept of scapegoating is central to the investigation of myth and ritual in society in René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

tactic not taken up in the same way in the cinema until almost a decade later. What the audience is left to focus on is an atmosphere; what is used to explain the bird attacks is a sense of the inevitable. The film begins, like Psycho, with an expansive shot of the city. We then see Melanie Daniels' nonchalant dismissal of her sighting of a large flock of gulls. By the end of the film Melanie's nonchalance, born out of wealth and position, dissolves as she is reduced to a near-catatonic state. Mitch's savoir faire also dissolves as he undergoes a subtle humiliation under Lydia, Annie, and Melanie. He is demeaned and attacked outright by his mother, then forced to admit his impotence in fending off the bird attacks. Lydia, the clinging mother, separates herself from her children when she fears for her own life. Annie is killed by the birds at the point when she seems to be resolving her jealousy and developing a sympathetic (lesbian?) relationship with Melanie. It is always tempting to say that the birds are a force of retribution, but good is redressed along with evil. The murder of the chicken farmer fits well into a "political" reading of the film; the birds crashing kamikaze-like into his bedroom windows may signify the selfless solidarity of a warring, oppressed class. But this murder is counter-balanced by the attack on the school, for which there seems little plausible rationale. It is noteworthy that the attack occurs after a very uneasy reconciliation between Melanie and Lydia; Melanie seems a bit testy about the errand of mercy she is performing and is even more disturbed by the errand being protracted by her rival Annie.

There can be no mistaking Melanie as the principal scapegoat in the narrative. Her scapegoating cannot be said to be direct since there is no real consensus in the community. The birds, if we are to regard them as Furies, do not have the role of representing consensus--only the

force of repression/oppression unleashed. This is why there seems little direct connection between the bird attacks and any specific incident in the everyday, natural world in which the characters are involved. Because nothing really "happens" in the narrative beyond the soap-opera bickerings of the principal characters, the bird attacks are especially jolting and horrific. This is the most significant element conjoining The Birds to Psycho, demonstrating a continuity between the two films. One could assert in retrospect that Norman Bates was principally a metaphor for the bubbling-over tensions of Marion and her own "normal" middle-class circle, just as the bird attacks (which have the same jarring suddenness and staccato rhythm of Mrs. Bates's knife) evidence the tensions of Bodega Bay. Both Norman and the birds appear out of nowhere, at first dismissible issues having little relation to the central stories of the respective narratives. There are various structural similarities between the two films, most prominent of which are Marion's and Melanie's attempts to flee the frustrations of bourgeois life. The importance of The Birds is the use of the "monster" strictly as metaphor of social crisis. Pathological repression is no longer localized; there is no scientist to explain the birds, no evidence of the unconscious surfacing.¹³

When a society cannot displace its evil in a systemic way, a disintegration into chaos must occur. An enormous amount of hate and suspicion is directed toward Melanie, but in an ambivalent manner that does not give vent to frustration. Her neuroses, fetishism, and sexual promiscuity might be seen, considering her eventual victimization, as

¹³The Daphne du Maurier story that inspired the film does not help us understand the allegorical nature of Hitchcock's narrative as well as Gabriel García Márquez's "One Day After Saturday," in No One Writes to the Colonel, trans. J.S. Bernstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

"sin," despite her neglect by her mother and unhappy early life which she describes to Mitch (the description of which precedes an attack on the Brenner home). But the equation of insanity with sin is not medieval: it is supported by Melanie's conscious involvement in repetition and her refusal to confront her unhappiness in an analytical manner, apparent in her flighty pursuit of Mitch. Her upper middle-class liberalism, including her involvement with orphan children and her linguistics classes at Berkeley, also speaks to this self-deceit.

The Birds presents apocalypse as a society's descent into primordial chaos, but it is a descent that is involuntary and dissimilar to primitive rite. It occurs because a society has fallen out of contact not with myth as such but with any common language and system of belief; it seems evident that ideological and psychoanalytic readings of this situation (relative to The Birds and succeeding films of apocalypse) must subsume this point. Like traditional apocalyptic literature, The Birds is not a cautionary tale; the state of crisis is accepted as a given and cannot be refused by analysis. The Brenners and Melanie seem to survive the disaster (at least temporarily), but unlike, for example, the story of Noah, there is no indication that their survival is the result of their fulfillment of a social or spiritual contract. At the same time there is no evidence to explain away the crisis in strictly social-psychological terms.

The importance of Psycho and The Birds is understood in light of the horror film's recent developments. Films as divergent as Romero's Night of the Living Dead and Jeff Lieberman's Squirm rely on The Birds' basic premise: society suddenly being overtaken by its own evil, now constituted as a mythic and unmanageable force. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Eaten Alive, The Hills Have Eyes, Mother's Day, Don't Go in

the House, Maniac, Frightmare, Friday the 13th, and earlier films such as Homicidal, Straitjacket, and Fanatic are all in Psycho's direct lineage. What distinguishes films like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre from Psycho's immediate successors is not its concentration on horror-as-pathology as much as what is perceived as Psycho's fundamental discovery. As will be demonstrated, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre recreates many elements of Psycho chiefly by way of showing the universality of evil and how pathology (if we are to define this evil as such) has origins in commonplace features of the American middle-class experience. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and its successors also rely on The Birds to replace Psycho's "psychoanalysis" with a mythical reading steadily denying the recuperability of society.

There are some particular ways by which Psycho and especially The Birds contain a perspective toward apocalypse that is extremely modernist yet dependent on tradition, and in this schizophrenia reside basic characteristics of apocalypticism. The horror film, through its heritage in the metaphysical, has been frequently resistant to systems of rational causality; the current horror film amplifies the disappearance of causality by debunking the conventions of the supernatural but also by deconstructing itself as a genre. While some current directors (e.g., David Cronenberg) tend to circumvent this process somewhat by a head-on rational analysis of mass psychopathology and by attempting to uncover "new myths" in the modern technological landscape, it is possible to attempt a unifying principle within the new apocalypticism only by recognizing the sense of the hopelessness of human intervention and the worthlessness of totalizing analytical or political systems.

It is worthwhile to view the continued impact of the perspective

represented in Psycho and The Birds within the most recent and possibly least representative (at least from an aesthetics standpoint) works of the genre, William Lustig's Maniac (1981). This representative of the "slasher" film cycle may be dismissible on aesthetic or ideological grounds, but its attention to the notion of causality's disappearance and the inability of society to recover itself must be noted, along with a probably unconscious overlap of psychological and ideological issues touched on in Psycho and The Birds respectively. Maniac seems particularly significant in its debt to Psycho; it along with numerous slasher films (including the popular Friday the 13th series) is concerned with the subject of the oppressive role of the mother and, more specifically, child abuse. Child abuse, an important current topic for sociology and law, finds an ironic locus for examination in the exploitation horror film. (The inclusion of such themes distinguish the "slasher" film from what might seem logical progenitors--the gore films of William Castle and Hershell G. Lewis, which are for the most part unoriginal attempts to capitalize on the style and success of Psycho.) In the horror genre the theme of child abuse approaches the metaphysical; rather than a component of the operation of the family (implied in Psycho), it is viewed as a grotesque aberration, but one that is linked inexorably (but vaguely) to all sexual relationships and the deification of woman in religion and traditional art. There are instances where Maniac, like Psycho, attempts to trace some foundation for pathology; Frank Zito's mother is revealed to have been a prostitute, and her reduction to a commodity appears to have caused her to displace her rage in her son. But this line of reasoning is ultimately refused. Maniac does not attempt Psycho's fairly systematic portrayal of a transpsychical illness. Rather, it ventures into a sense of cosmic evil and

malaise that reminds us of the way The Birds refused the perspective of Psycho.

Maniac "answers" the themes it borrows from Psycho by an intertextual usage of responses to the upheaval and malaise found in other recent works. Frank Zito wears a military jacket and prowls an atmospheric New York in the manner of Travis Bickle in Taxi Driver; he murders a young woman with a bayonet in a lavatory where "apocalypse now" appears on a wall as graffiti. One helicopter flyover sequence and its concurrent soundtrack recall the opening of Coppola's film.¹⁴

Maniac acknowledges the centrality of Scorsese's and Coppola's films (both of which will be discussed) to the horror film's new wave as much as to the apocalyptic temperament of the '70s and '80s. By referring to Taxi Driver and the Vietnam War, the film deliberately relates the psychoses of Travis Bickle and Norman Bates, and suggests that Frank Zito is explainable by an understanding of the world of Scorsese's film as much as by a reading of Psycho. Maniac makes Psycho and Taxi Driver blur together, and by so doing further obscures any clear analysis of the root cause of social disturbance: the final shot of Norman's death's head grin looms larger than his psychiatrist's comforting explanations.

The citations of Apocalypse Now further compound the situation as apocalypse is constantly reasserted. In its usage by Maniac, Apocalypse Now seems more explainable by reference to Totem and Taboo than The Golden Bough. Like Apocalypse Now, Maniac begins in medias res with death, that is, with an ending. What Maniac emphasizes about

¹⁴One musical composition for the score to Maniac by Jay Chattaway is entitled "Apocalypse N.Y." (Varese Sarabande STV 81143).

Apocalypse Now are not the mythic and literary references Coppola uses to explain his story, but the notion of a descent into hell, the pervasiveness of insanity, the irreducible nature of evil, and the link between insanity and evil that cannot be refused by interpretation. In short, Apocalypse Now is alluded to as a horror movie informing other horror movies. Frank, like Willard and Kurtz, "goes too far," but not for any overreaching mythical purpose. Frank's scalpings and mutilations of victims, like Norman Bates's mummification of his parent, reduces primitive or ritual violence--that violence often lionized in folklore--to its pathological core. But this film, unlike Psycho, stops short of clinical definition since it assumes, much like Apocalypse Now, that the recognition of a transpsychical illness constitutes a perverse new mythology; psychopathology is fetishized.

Frank has a plethora of toys and gimcrack fetishes in his apartment, most of which are recent consumer products and cannot be explained solely in terms of Frank's regressive adherence to an early stage of development. While the viewer is shown far more immediately than in Psycho that the subject matter concerns psychosis, s/he is bombarded with forms of evidence ostensibly aimed at explaining the nature of this psychosis in a way that attempts to subvert a systematic reading of the film; is Frank a victim of child abuse or some sort of product of post-Vietnam social dysfunction? This is by no means to suggest that Maniac is unreadable (I doubt if a close reading is ultimately very profitable), but rather that it refuses the conventional sense of closure associated not just with horror but most all commercial narrative film. One cannot say that films like Maniac are as representative of some of the dominant concerns of current apocalypticism as, say, the

works of Tobe Hooper, George Romero, or David Cronenberg; the most subversive element of the slasher sub-genre is the attempt to assert and in some sense valorize the psychotic as a representative figure. But this valorization does not carry with it any redefinition of psychosis (such as might be offered by Foucault or Deleuze and Guattari) and its function in society. At the end of the film Frank's disturbance and guilt cause him to hallucinate himself suffering a revenge at the hands of his dead victims; the gratuitous nature of the episode is so designed to draw the spectator into identification with the revenge, while the text at that point has revealed Frank as a pitiable wretch. Rather than use its landscape as a parodical figure for the failure of the American civilizing process (as in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre), Maniac assumes and exploits a general scoffing at all humanist impulses, at all critical interpretations of behavior. The ideological and psychological reasonings of crime are made to dissolve in a tacit consensus of disbelief in any human purpose.

Maniac may be representative only in its extreme pessimism, but, after all, few of the films described herein have any eschatological system attached to their visions of apocalypse. The exploitation film may be aesthetically and philosophically distant from the main current of apocalyptic sensibility we see in The Birds, but at least part of such films' success may reside in their general disavowal of causality, their assault on reason and liberalism, and their expressed contempt for the idea of the individual as social being which often surface as controlling factors of their apocalypse. As this expression asserts a view of apocalypse divergent from religious tradition, it should become apparent how apocalypse intersects with the general world-view of works outside the genre that continue a critique of the civilizing experience.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF APOCALYPTIC CRISIS:
HOOPER, CRAVEN, CRONENBERG

It would be a fallacy to assert that the apocalypse of the contemporary horror film is the product simply of a particular set of crises occurring in America over the past several years. While it is true that many of the themes of the horror film are responses to recent American experience, the apocalypticism we address must be viewed against the backdrop of a long history of millennialism in American art. In this sense it is important to understand how American cinema has functioned as a repository for various ideas, including systems of apocalyptic belief, and how a strain of pessimistic (or "counter-revelatory") apocalyptic thinking has found a culmination in the horror genre.

It is quite possible to tie the development of apocalypticism in horror to an intellectual tradition distinct from the visions of catastrophe and utopia in, say, science-fiction. The horror film, particularly since Psycho and The Birds, has become heavily involved in asking questions about the fundamental validity of the American civilizing experience. The introduction commented on some of the intellectual foundations of apocalypticism in American art, particularly its relationship to the consciousness growing out of the Puritan movement. It is reasonable to say that large sectors of American art have had a relationship to the apocalyptic vision. Scholars such as Leo Marx touch at least tangentially on the idea of apocalypse by examining how technology has destroyed the

Edenic vision of America.¹ Even more methodical examinations of American civilization have relied on the notion of entropy to explain how the horizontal energy expended on the development of the frontier would eventually implode as America established its boundaries and built its cities.² Such theories have a relationship to Spengler's notion of a society degenerating from the purer epic moment of Culture to Civilization.

In the critical analyses of this chapter the focus will be on horror films whose enterprise seems largely involved with exploding the frontier myth and the optimistic assumptions of American expansionism. By citing so much iconography and so many themes of American popular art (especially the Western) usually associated with a traditional vision of pioneer society, Tobe Hooper's The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Wes Craven's The Hills Have Eyes both appear involved in Psycho's earlier exploration of a common pathology. These horror films could be termed even more "revisionist" than the Western of the late '60s in their attention to social and psychological rather than merely political instability. In fact, these films attempt to interrelate all of these elements to discredit the overall ideology that informed America's previous sense of a divinely-ordained "mission"³ that was the underpinning of frontier development. The irony of these films is their final adherence to an apocalyptic rather than political/analytic view, their acceptance of the inevitability of collapse. There

¹Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

²See Brooks Adams, The Law of Civilization and Decay (1924; reprint ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1959).

³See Ernest Cassara, "The Development of America's Sense of Mission," in Lois P. Zamora, ed., The Apocalyptic Vision in America (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1982), p. 64.

may be no real irony here since the constraints of dominant culture allow for an abject pessimism in critiques of social predicaments but not for suggestions of revolutionary programs of change. In fairness, these works would probably not be horror films if they diluted their cataclysmic visions of pervasive psychosis with glimpses of an alternative world; this is why the horror film can be singled out as the most representative example of apocalypticism as it is currently understood.

Later in this chapter the films of David Cronenberg will be examined for their elaboration of North American civilization at its end point. Cronenberg suggests, like his contemporaries, society's return to barbarism, but this barbarism occurs not on the desolate remains of the frontier but within the modern necropolis of the present, the urban enclaves that resulted from flickering civilizing energies. The films of Hooper and Craven deal, like Psycho, with hidden outposts of pathology tucked away on the modern landscape like repressed dreams behind the facade of middle-class well-being and complacency. Cronenberg takes a somewhat different strategy, looking immediately and spontaneously at the chaos of the urban hellscape, assuming that the crisis of corporate culture and the cybernetic age is transpsychical. What unites these films is their distinct mythopoeic styles. Hooper's and Craven's films assume that America's mythic past is dead or perverted, the only plausible contemporary mythology being barbarism itself; Cronenberg is not involved explicitly with American mythology, but is concerned with telling his stories through the devices of mythic allegories, believing that archetypal myth still contains a common, communicable language. There is also the sense in Cronenberg's films that society may be able to rejuvenate itself by renewing its connections to myth, a concept denied by Hooper and Craven.

Cronenberg, an artist as cynical as his contemporaries, still seems to hold out for myth, as if awaiting the possibility of a renewal of divine contracts and the chance of transcendence. In this Cronenberg also belongs squarely in the apocalyptic tradition.

It should become apparent that the tone and ideas set by these films, the basic premises about crisis and apocalypse, will be reiterated in various respects in many of the films discussed throughout this study. The theme of barbaric regression, the tortured ambivalence over questions of religion and a mythic past, the theme of the spiritually fallow wasteland (perhaps the most recurring theme of twentieth-century art) have different degrees of emphasis in all of the films examined herein. This is certainly not to argue that Hooper, Craven, and Cronenberg are prophets of a new form of artistic expression in the 1970s (the relationship of their films to earlier fantastic cinema and the apocalyptic tradition should become obvious), but to indicate that their works can act as a model for exploration in a developing tendency. A similar case will be made in the last chapter for two films rather outside the genre that seem to "explain" the nature of the crisis whose characteristics are laid out by the horror film.

II

Tobe Hooper's The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1973) represents a crucial moment in the history of the horror genre when the form develops a specific relationship to the historical and cultural trend discussed and to a distinct period of discontent in American society. Although Hooper's film has been analyzed (incorrectly) as being a forerunner of the "slasher" films of the 1970s, we find that its scope is far broader and significant.

I have earlier discussed Psycho and note here Robin Wood's reference as "a key work of our age,"⁴ one that could be deciphered and accepted only by a mass audience in a world that has witnessed the death camps, the rise of the nuclear age, and the impact of psychoanalysis on everyday human interchange. If Psycho began an exploration of "the psychopathology of everyday life," and the diseased underbelly of American Gothic, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre carries this exploration to a logical conclusion, addressing many of the issues of Hitchcock's film while placing them within the apocalyptic perspective inherited by genre art.

Begun by a group of young Austin filmmakers working through a private backer and on a minimal budget,⁵ The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1973) was meant, according to Hooper and scriptwriter Kim Henkel, to comment on the "moral schizophrenia of the Watergate era."⁶ There are indeed ways in which Hooper's film works as a metapolitical document; one critic has gone so far as to remark that The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is "close in feeling" to Coppola's Apocalypse Now, in that both works involve the viewer in a "collusion in the face of triumphant barbarism."⁷

The apocalyptic sentiment of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is evident first in its "documentary" aspect. On one level the film is meant to be approached as a "true story" and has some features of the documentary,

⁴Robin Wood, Hitchcock's Films (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1965), p. 144.

⁵The full production history of the film is detailed in Ellen Farley and William K. Knoedelseder, Jr., "The Real Texas Chainsaw Massacre," The Los Angeles Times, 5 September 1982, Section 4, p. 1. See also Danny Peary, Cult Films (New York: Delta Books, 1981), p. 347.

⁶Farley and Knoedelseder, "The Real Texas Chainsaw Massacre," p. 31.

⁷Andrew Britton, "Sideshow: Hollywood in Vietnam," Movie 27/28 (Winter 1980/Spring 1981):13.

so in one realm of the ideas it presents the film has the chronicle function of "docudrama." The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is, in fact, based on a real historical event (which also inspired Psycho over a decade earlier) and is able to condense a number of historical incidents into its text to give the film real force and poetic resonance. The film as a recreation of actual crimes interlocks with a broader notion of the story's historical incidents having "cosmic" significance. It is in this area that the film's apocalypticism surfaces and places it within the mainstream of apocalyptic thought.

The plot is deceptively simple and clearly traditional. It is the Hansel-and-Gretel story of apparently innocent youth stumbling upon unexplained and unimaginable evil. Sally and her boyfriend Jerry, along with Kirk and Pam and Sally's crippled brother Franklyn, take a trip through East Texas via Kirk's van. Their ultimate destination is unclear--we assume they are on a vacation outing. When they hear radio reports of atrocities at a local cemetery, the young people detour to see if the grave of Sally's grandfather has been defiled. When everything is discovered to be in order the five continue with a trip that takes them past sprawling cattle pens; Franklyn delights in detailing the new mechanization used in livestock slaughter. Franklyn's monologue rambles on, interrupted by Sally's quotes from the recent issue of her astrology magazine. Kirk stops the van to pick up a very ragged-looking hitchhiker. In short order we are aware that the hitchhiker is insane. He jumps into Franklyn's discourse on meat processing, then takes a Polaroid snapshot of the travelers. He ends up mutilating himself with a penknife and destroying the snapshot by fire in noticeably ritual manner. He jumps from the van, smearing his bloody hand on a rear fender, forming what later

appears to a terrified and perplexed Franklyn to be a hex sign. The five continue on their way, ending up at a ruined mansion that once belonged to Sally's grandfather. We learn that the grandfather was once in the cattle business. The two couples tour the crumbling house while the wheelchair-bound Franklyn remains outside. As Sally muses over the torn wallpaper she remembers from childhood, Franklyn discovers bizarre artifacts of feathers and animal bones.

Kirk and Pam wander away from the mansion to an old swimming hole and then to a ramshackle farmhouse on another property. Kirk assumes the house is occupied and attempts to buy gasoline. We are shown images of the surrounding grounds: barren trees and shrubs are adorned with tin cups and plates (apparently to be cleaned, pioneer-fashion, by the sun and sand); toys and lawn furniture are strewn about in disuse. Kirk discovers a number of abandoned vehicles in a camouflaged yard behind the house. When Kirk enters the house in search of assistance, he is savagely murdered by a huge man in a leather mask. The man is never referred to by name but is listed in the credits as "Leatherface." Leatherface eventually captures, kills and mutilates Jerry, Pam, and Franklyn; we learn that Leatherface is a member of a family of crazed cannibals, including the crazed hitchhiker and an older man who operates a service station/luncheonette at which the youngsters stopped earlier. Sally is the only survivor of a night of murder and madness; she is captured and tortured by the cannibals in a grisly parody of the Mad Tea Party, but manages to escape and, after a harrowing pursuit down a back road, is rescued by a passing truck driver. The final image is of a berserk Leatherface alone on the highway against a setting sun, wildly swinging a chainsaw overhead in frustration.

The simplicity of the film is particularly noteworthy in its absence of any extraneous element and its de-emphasis of dialogue. In fact, the second half of the film is almost totally lacking in speech, the soundtrack being filled with Sally's screams, the insane mutterings of the cannibals, and the constant whir of Leatherface's chainsaw. Despite these characteristics the film has some obvious structural and thematic similarities to Psycho, and a distinction between the two films is where a discussion of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre really begins. While Hitchcock seems concerned with showing how various forms of repression lead to compulsive/schizophrenic behavior⁸ (which Hitchcock views with the humor associated with the average layman's disdain for psychoanalysis), Hooper concentrates on this schizophrenia as a widespread phenomenon of modern society that no discipline can fully explain. Hooper goes to greater lengths than Hitchcock in referring to images associated with the American landscape: the family home, the annual vacation trip, the town church and cemetery, the fascination with strange hobbies and cultish beliefs, the culling of childhood memories, the squabbling among siblings, the allusion to professions and industries long entrenched in the American economy all serve in building Hooper's sense of an overwhelmingly catastrophic situation that is about to explode. Hooper's main source material works to present the notion of an apocalypse in microcosm that is gradually revealed to have a sweeping significance.

Hooper, like Hitchcock, draws on a specific event in recent history for The Texas Chainsaw Massacre's "documentary" aspect. The

⁸There are, of course, numerous worthwhile studies of Psycho in print. Among the more recent noteworthy investigations is Donald Spoto, The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976).

gruesome crimes of Ed Gein, a Wisconsin handyman who, in 1957, was discovered to be a mass murderer and cannibal is the now well-known source material for the novel by Robert Bloch that became Hitchcock's Psycho. The details of the Gein crimes are more faithfully rendered in Hooper's film, particularly in Leatherface's fetishism, his use of human skin as a mask, and the artworks made of human and animal remains.

The Ed Gein crimes set off much intellectual activity outside of cinema and popular novels. Social psychologists struggled for ways to explain these atrocities to a complacent public of the Eisenhower years.⁹ New studies of repression in relation to middle America appeared, the most popular of which did not reach the public until over fifteen years after the Gein crimes. Michael Lesy's Wisconsin Death Trip, a kind of photo-monograph originally accepted as a graduate thesis at Rutgers University, was published during a period of renewed interest in the pathological elements of American culture, particularly the atmosphere of the 1950s.¹⁰ The text of this book is very thin, the work relying very much on a collection of nineteenth-century portraits of small-town Wisconsin residents. In his research Lesy discovered that numerous bizarre crimes (arson, murder, myriad forms of sexual deviance) occurred in the same rural communities that produced the serene images Lesy unearthed from newspaper offices and private collections. What connection, if any, could there be between these images and the "real" history

⁹The facts of the Ed Gein crimes are recounted in Jay Robert Nash, Bloodletters and Badmen: A Narrative Encyclopedia of American Criminals from the Pilgrims to the Present (New York: M. Evans & Company, 1973), p. 206. An intelligent essay on Gein is in David Schreiner, "Ed Gein and the Left Hand of God," Weird Trips, No. 2, p. 20. The comic book aspect of this magazine should not deceive the reader; the article by Schreiner is valuable.

¹⁰Michael Lesy, Wisconsin Death Trip (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973).

of Wisconsin (and, by extension perhaps, a large segment of rural America)? By excluding any mention of Ed Gein, certainly Wisconsin's most notorious criminal, Lesy seems to suggest that the individual crime is only symptomatic of the general corruption of an organism (society), and it is because such crimes are seen as remarkable that the reason for aberration remains enigmatic.

It can be asserted that Hooper's conclusions on this subject are far more forceful than Lesy's. In examining his photographs and Wisconsin history, Lesy relies on theories of repression derived from Freud, Erikson, even Max Nordau. Lesy's explanation of Mid-Western crime (which is not so different from Robin Wood's analysis of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre¹¹) is that frustration set in among a group of already deracinated people disenfranchised by entrepreneurial capitalism and who were long since psychologically torn by the in-built contradictions of Calvinist theology and the Protestant ethic. The rise of the major East and West Coast cities and the principal commercial power bases further alienated these people, giving rise to the fragmented nature of American character and creating the fabled "silent majority" of Nixon, a group presented to us as a frightening and vengeful social class. The crimes and general bizarrierie of the Wisconsin people can be seen, following Lesy's research, as apocalypticism in actual practice; a need to provoke crisis in the hope of effectuating change, a possible renewal. This apocalypticism begins on an individual, microcosmic scale, but its psychological origins become transpsychical and symbolic of a crisis in the general

¹¹See Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in Andrew Britton, et al., The American Nightmare (Toronto: Festival of Festivals Publications, 1979), pp. 7-28.

community. An extension of the crisis Lesy outlines is a tendency toward self-destruction that is collective in its appearance and consequences, and represents the perceived need for a total assault on society when change is thought to be impossible or too threatening to consider.

It is on this terrain that Hooper films The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Hooper parts company with Lesy in the filmmaker's sense that the forces bringing about the dissolution of society are intangible and overwhelming; psychoanalysis and anthropology must be seen merely as the only tools we have to deal with certain phenomena. The "cosmic" nature of Hooper's film is suggested early through the images of solar fires against the opening credits. Images of a huge sun, a moon, and their micro/macro-cosmic relationship to other images (such as the eyeball of a terrified Sally filmed with a macrozoom lens) recur throughout the film; we are reminded of the moon in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," and how the "orb of the satellite" shows through the crumbling Usher facade. Like Poe, Hooper is concerned with showing how an edifice viewed from a distance seems intact, but how a close inspection reveals not only numerous flaws but the general infirmity of the structure.

Hooper shows a modernist sensibility in describing his apocalyptic vision. The cosmic upheaval he portrays is apparent in his sound/image conjunction, the overlaying of the soundtrack, the non-linear nature of his editing, and the de-emphasis of the spoken word. As we read the credits during the solar fire sequence we hear the voice of a radio announcer (emanating, we discover, from Kirk's van) detailing a terrible discovery in a cemetery: two corpses have been unearthed and assembled in a sodomic position to form a grotesque tableau. The way we are informed of this in the film suggests it is unlikely that this broadcast in fact sets

the action of the film into motion, since Sally, Franklyn and their friends are already traveling in the van at the time the broadcast occurs. Although Hooper allows the broadcast to recede on the soundtrack as we are introduced to the young people, we are able to hear news of other calamities: the discovery in another part of the country of a body with genitals missing (making determination of sex difficult); incidents of international terrorism; oil spills; wholesale arson in a major city, etc. At each instance Hooper emphasizes the sense of an Evil Age and a pall of inexplicable doom that cannot be revoked by some interpretive force (such as might be brought to bear by Norman Bates's psychiatrist). The documentary-style prologue (the graveyard tableau) is subverted by the vagueness or total lack of explanation for all that follows; there is no clear reason for the trip by Sally, Franklyn, et al., for the existence or behavior of the cannibal family, for the attack on the young people, or for Sally's eventual rescue. In his analysis of this film Robin Wood, advancing his "return of the repressed" thesis, argues that Leatherface and his family are simply products of oppression by industrial capitalism. They are, after all, out-of-work slaughterhouse workers whose skills are rendered obsolete by technology. Their cannibalism is, according to Wood, a logical extension and a proper metaphor for consumerism in capitalist society.¹² But Wood's thesis is undercut somewhat by its rigidity, since his Marxism projects an ideological view onto the film that is not wholly justified by the evidence. It is reasonable to assume that the situation in the world of the film has economic/ideological origins, but to suggest Marxism as an ameliorating force has little relevance here and it is part of the film's apocalypticism to deny the benefit of such analysis.

¹²Ibid., p. 20.

The denial of causality and emphasis on ritual structures suggests an apocalypse that is both primitive and modernist in spirit. The "primitive" aspect refers to the ritual atmosphere surrounding the film's horrors and the way characters interact in a situation of chaos; the "modernist" aspect denies the primitive belief in a cyclical view of time and asserts instead an absolute dead end without the possibility of renewal or even resolution.

We can also call The Texas Chainsaw Massacre a film of "primitive apocalypse" with both "sacred" and "profane" impulses for several reasons. The film is about a world dissolving into primordial chaos, set in an archetypal wasteland where the sustaining forces of civilization are not operative. The cannibal motif, which occurs in a number of films to follow Hooper's success, suggests a number of ideas about the resuscitation of primitive culture that need to be dealt with in detail. The profane element of the film is the localization of the cataclysm precisely in the historical situation of the American Southwest in the late twentieth century. In this area Hooper achieved a minor coup when he cast John Henry Faulk--the blacklisted radio personality of the 1950s--as a senile drunk lounging in a truck tire at the cemetery Sally visits. He says: "Nobody listens to an old man...but I've seen things...things nobody wants to hear about." Faulk's presence gives the brief scene some resonance. The drunk can be seen as Chorus, as chronicler of the grotesquerie that encompasses the world of the film. But if Hooper is inserting a Chorus here, it may be to give the lie to the traditional idea of insightful rural folk with their homespun wisdom and common-sense philosophy; the terror that we see overwhelming the country is a culmination of the notion of the violent disruption of the security and stability of rural and suburban life (Walking Tall), and we are reminded of the often barbaric

historical backdrop that preceded this civilization. Beyond this, the acceptance of the drunk as a conventional Chorus is to accept the workings of insight, reason and causality in the film, which are clearly elements Hooper wants to show have been demolished.

It must be emphasized that Hooper's apocalypse is not one associated with conventional notions of revelation or the reconstitution of society. The secularism and pessimism of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is close in feeling to the "vengeful" religious impulse of the Christian apocalypse, but without this theology's sense of faith. What remains is the notion that what cannot be changed must be destroyed totally to escape the "terror of history" (Mircea Eliade's term), a concept also running through the films of David Cronenberg, Scorsese's Taxi Driver, and Coppola's Apocalypse Now.

The refusal of cyclical thinking in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre's apocalypticism is the denial of belief in a theory that allows for the possibility of change, that offers a faith in man's ability to perceive a role in and eventually effect control over history. If there is anything "cyclical" to Hooper's world-view there is a complement to Frank Kermode's notion that man's need to apprehend Crisis occurs throughout history, that the beginning and end of the individual life must be seen as having a "fictive concord with origins and ends, such as give meanings to lives and to poems...The End they imagine will reflect their irreducibly intermediary preoccupations."¹³ In the context of this thinking, cyclical theories of secular history can only express skepticism at the concept of a divinely-

¹³ Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theories of Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 22. See a discussion of Kermode in Bernard McGinn, Apocalyptic Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

motivated end to history and a spontaneous resolution of humanity's travails. The film certainly does not propose a Spenglerian theory of the cyclical rise and fall of civilization in history. The film is never that deliberate or clear-headed. Rather, it projects a primitive feeling that does not admit to analysis and remains rooted firmly within a cyclical pattern that cannot be escaped, let alone viewed objectively from without. This is about all that makes the "cosmogony" of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre primitive, since the film certainly has nothing to say about rebirth or renewal at the beginning of a new cycle in time.

The unnerving and, to many, dissatisfying dénouement to Hooper's film--the image of Leatherface swinging his chainsaw against a sunset--is abrupt and genuinely cataclysmic. One imagines the character as the camera apparatus in Snow's La Région Centrale, with his own point-of-view registering a world careening off kilter. Unlike the "explanatory" ending of Psycho, there is no comfortable sense of closure to The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, so in this way at least Hooper subverts the "sense of an ending" that Kermode feels is basic to the apocalyptic impulse to bring history under control through the mediation of art. Hooper prefers to create a Crisis, to present a world returning to chaos (usually a precondition for regeneration), an Evil Age in primitive and Eastern eschatologies. Yet, as if to offset the Evil Age motif he creates early in the film, Hooper introduces an eschatological sense more kindred to the thinking of antiquity: the gods, if they exist, are capricious, and intervention itself is to be distrusted. Although we can assume that the world of this film is the consequence of a long historical process, there is nothing to suggest (as there is in Psycho) that anything can be recuperated and a new epoch begun. Sally's deus ex machina rescue at the

end of the film expresses this very clearly. There is a tragic concept here more profound than in conventional Western apocalypticism, since Hooper reiterates the link established by critics such as Jan Kott between the ancient and contemporary absurdist world-views.¹⁴

Hooper's vision is compatible with the Greek view that man's tragedy is his powerlessness in confronting fate, that the dissolution of his age into chaos is not of his own making.¹⁵ In this sense the "moral schizophrenia" the filmmakers are describing cannot be easily understood through Marxist/Freudian methodologies, since these methods propose a system of belief and a kind of faith that is indeed often described as millennic. The atmosphere of an Evil Age that gives the film its force depends finally on its main horrific element--cannibalism. Noteworthy here is René Girard's comment that

...cannibalism has not yet found its Freud and been promoted to the status of a major contemporary myth. Some filmmakers have tried, to be sure, to bring cannibalism into fashion, but their efforts to date have been less than successful.¹⁶

Girard is in error here, although it is unclear if he is opting for humor. A number of Freudian studies have analyzed the introduction of cannibalism into art, and if we are to judge by the sheer number of films with cannibalism as a theme (Night of the Living Dead, Cannibals in the Streets, Zombie, Frightmare, Raw Meat, etc.), this form of horror has indeed been "successful" at least in terms of eliciting a response from the mass audience.

¹⁴See Jan Kott, The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy, trans. Boleslaw Taborski and Edward J. Czerevinski (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).

¹⁵Debra Bergoffen, "The Apocalyptic Meaning of History," in Lois Zamora, The Apocalyptic Vision in America, p. 17.

¹⁶René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 277.

Cannibalism has always been implied as a theme in horror, especially in the werewolf and vampire films; analysts have referred to oral attacks on the victim as emblematic of regression to the infantile stage, where attempts to satisfy libidinal impulses overlap with the instinct for nourishment and survival.¹⁷ George Romero's Night of the Living Dead was the first work to literalize the theme of cannibalism, to suggest the relation of the theme to repetition and the death instinct, and to illustrate the image of society "feeding on itself." It is The Texas Chainsaw Massacre that gives cannibalism a mythic as well as political dimension and allows it the broader resonance suitable to a metaphor in the horror genre.

While our understanding of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre benefits from attention to various disciplines, it would be extreme to argue that the filmmakers have done a schematic reworking of violence and cannibalistic ritual as understood by structural anthropology. It would be equally extreme, however, to ignore the scholarship that has informed us how cannibalism, on a metaphoric level, operates in Western consciousness. Certainly the increased recurrence of the subject in the horror film, even if reduced to the gratuitous qualifications of the "splatter" film, can be understood solely by recognizing the threads of this theme in cultural experience and how its language communicates.

Mircea Eliade has noted that ritual cannibalism is the consequence of a tragic religious conception.¹⁸ In many areas of mytho/anthropological study, cannibalism has been associated with a regenerative function. On a

¹⁷This is discussed in relation to the horror film in David Pirie, The Vampire Cinema (London: Crescent Books, 1975), pp. 16-18.

¹⁸Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957; reprint ed., Harvest Books, 1965), p. 106.

symbolic level the consumption of "sacred" flesh (the Eucharist¹⁹) involves replenishing the spiritual aspect of a culture and reminding society of its sense of communion. Most studies in cultural anthropology note that anthropophagy occurs in a period when a given society perceives its breakdown and finds a need to descend to an extreme level of experience through collective violence or sexual orgy, which lead to or are associated with cannibalism itself. This descent recapitulates the origins of the world in turmoil, when the sacred time of the gods crossed into the profane world. Eliade also notes that cannibalism has never been seen as "natural" behavior in primitive society, but rather is always "cultural behavior, based on a religious view of life."²⁰ The act of cannibalism in primitive society always suggests a hearkening back to the cosmic origins of the world to regain the primeval force that sparked the beginning of history. In Western mythology we are reminded of the war of the Titans in antiquity, of Cronus devouring his children and the epic clashes of families, as in the House of Pelops. Cannibalism can signify not only the consuming of the spiritual power of the gods (making a connection to sacred time) but ultimate revenge on a foe or his progeny by devouring his strength and redressing a long-term historical debt.

In Western civilization there is no question, of course, that cannibalism has always had evil connotation. The actual consumption of the human being (rather than in symbolic ritual) has signalled societal inversion, as we learn as far back as Porphyry's De abstinencia.²¹ The

¹⁹This is discussed in Richard Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860 (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 48 passim.

²⁰Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, p. 103.

²¹Discussed in Marcel Detienne, "Between Beasts and Gods," in R.L. Gordon, ed., Myth, Religion & Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 218.

apocalyptic literary tradition has likewise associated cannibalism with barbarism and the dissolution rather than revitalization of society.²²

The torture of Sally in Hooper's film is particularly ritual in nature and in keeping with traditional associations of cannibalism with rite and with the apocalyptic spirit. Sally is a victim, but her relative anonymity and the arbitrariness of her selection suggests she is a scapegoat. Girard has noted that

the mechanism of the surrogate victim is redemptive twice over; by promoting unanimity it quells violence on all fronts, and by preventing an outbreak of bloodshed within the community it keeps the truth about men from becoming known.²³

Of course the cannibals, while they constitute a group, are insane; yet because the psychosis is shared the actions each member undertakes can be said to reflect the perceived "best interests" of their society. The "sacrifice" of Sally mimics aspects of ritual or, rather, the converse of ritual since we discover that this violence, which is familiar to us at least through the art form we observe, is empty of any signification in the sense formerly associated with collective violence. Hooper focuses not so much on what the cannibals do to Sally (which is relatively little) as on the extremes of her terror and the way the cannibals project their hate and collective violence upon her. Sally is by turns honored and vilified, as in primitive ritual, to a point where she is literally driven insane. Leatherface and his crazed brother delight in tormenting Sally during her initial phase of shock and pleading; she is mocked for thinking that pity and reason have anything to do with the needs of the society to which she now belongs. The cannibals do not respond to Sally's plea "I'll do

²²See Lois P. Zamora, "The Myth of Apocalypse and the American Literary Tradition," in The Apocalyptic Vision in America, p. 126.

²³Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 42.

anything," since they don't see the magical connotations of female sexuality perpetrated by dominant culture. But even this mockery falls apart since the cannibals are in so little control of themselves they cannot even conclude the murder of their victim. The real ritual dimension may be Hooper's refusal to accede to the most important conventions of the genre and of drama itself; the catharsis meant to be reached by the work is denied, destroying a common code shared by the audience. Just as the blood Sally might shed has no role in "replenishing" Hooper's horrific wasteland, the vacuousness of the conventions of genre art must be recognized; the real horror of the film does not appear, after all, until everything has been exhausted, until nothing but screams fill the soundtrack.

The "cosmic" opening of the film against the backdrop of solar fire, the sense of rampant evil, the uses of classical devices such as Chorus, the references to astrology, and the idea of totemism as iconographic emblem all create Hooper's mythic dimension. Sally's preoccupation with astrology, further underlined by visual references to the sun and moon, enhance this dimension. Sally's statement that "Saturn is in retrograde" reminds us²⁴ that the Age of Aquarius actually signalled a time of cultural regression and already a period of darkness has set in. More important, the references to Saturn develop the fundamental definitions of the Evil Age as a period when reason and all language/symbol systems break down. Sally is alienated from her friends by her astrology fetishism; this situation is sensible since astrology is associated with the "old religion" of sorcery, the nemesis of Christian humanism and the rise of the scientific method. Only Franklyn, Sally's crippled, temperamental,

²⁴See Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," p. 20.

and possibly psychotic brother, is enthralled with Sally's remarks. He is equally enthralled and frightened by the bloody mark the hitchhiker leaves on the van, finding in it some magical code or curse. When he asks for an explanation of it Pam replies: "I guess everything means something." In fact, Pam's thinking must be turned on its ear--nothing has meaning since reason has collapsed into a condition of hysteria. Moreover, the atmosphere of the occult flies in the face of the Christian divine contract that reappears in the imagery of American art (John Ford's funerals and church services).

Sally and Franklyn (with the mimetic doubles of Leatherface and his brother) are central figures of this film. Their's is the blood relationship, which compares with the blood ties of the cannibals and repeats the traditional construct of warring clans. Within this is the notion that Franklyn, presumably the eldest male of Sally's clan, is paralyzed--paralysis as a figure for impotence can be underscored by Franklyn's cowardice. Franklyn would unquestionably be the strongest member of the group (physically) were it not for his ailment, but he is now forced to ask for his sister's help to maneuver his wheelchair. Our first sense of evil in the film (outside of the prologue) comes through Franklyn; he is the first to respond to the hitchhiker's "curse" and the one who discovers and is alarmed by the otherwise meaningless bone fetishes in the ruined home of his grandfather. He is also the first to buy (unknowingly) a piece of barbecue at the roadside stand owned by one of the cannibals, causing him to enter into a tacit contract with the opposing, barbaric clan. Although he discards the meat, we recognize that the descent into barbarism is shared. After he witnesses the hitchhiker's auto-cannibalistic self-mutilation, Franklyn tells Kirk in wonderment: "That must

really take somethin', y'know, to just go and do that...I mean that takes somethin'." Franklyn equates the act with a test of will, like the blood-brother rite of the American Indian; it is of course closer to G. Gordon Liddy's famous hand-singeing with a candle. Franklyn cannot see such acts as the apocalyptic gesture in microcosm, i.e., the tendency to self-destruction to provoke a crisis in oneself when there is no resolution to the frustration of interchange in the exterior world. The blubbering cowardice and psychopathology of Franklyn and the insanity of the cannibals form an important and very complementary dichotomy. Franklyn is the only obvious Southwesterner of Sally's group; he knows tales of his region and is the identifiable "pioneer stock" figure. As such he and the cannibals together represent the notion that the drives that propelled this civilization forward can now be seen as reduced to obsessive/compulsive behavior. This situation is especially pathetic in Franklyn's case, since he is reduced to little more than a target for the abuse by his peers, and although his peers are ostensibly more vital, they are nonetheless shallow and idiotic.

Sally is ultimately the true focal point of unreason in the film and the fact that most of the truly horrific moments of the film involve her defines her as a scapegoat whose punishment might provoke catharsis. The hysteria of the film is associated with the link between language's collapse and the reign of the female principle. Sally's screams overwhelm the film; they do not abate as the film ends, the Dionysianism not being expelled. Sally's hysteria is signalled early on as she attempts to restore order but cannot even locate her grandfather's grave. She is caught up in astrology, a much more legitimized superstition than the meandering anxieties of her brother. She is enraptured by the filthy

wallpaper in her grandfather's mansion--on which she envisioned zebras in her childhood--while Kirk simultaneously spots a swarm of insects.

The ease with which Sally and her friends enter onto the landscape suggests the casual acceptance of a dead world. The crumbling mansion and defiled graveyard are curiosities to them, and some images privileged for the viewer (sick and dying cattle, a dead armadillo on the road, surrealist junk in the cannibals' backyard) pass the young people unnoticed. The cannibals' onslaught sets up a warfare between clans that is an attempt at final expiation in a decadent universe, but it is an onslaught that goes nowhere. It has been suggested in several locations that the action of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre dissolves, as in absurdist drama.²⁵ The chase sequence at the conclusion, for example, goes in a circle, as Leatherface pursues Sally from the cannibals' homestead to the old man's gas station, where she is captured and brought back to the homestead. Circularity is also seen in the implied sense of routine to the cannibals' daily lives, the feeling that they carry out a perverse mirror reflection of ordinary lower middle class existence, something Hitchcock suggests about Norman Bates early in Psycho. A key emblem of this circularity and of the collapse of time is a pocket watch with a nail driven through it, a Dadaist piece of sculpture swinging from a shrub on the cannibals' lawn. A more literal collapse of time is seen at the dinner party where Sally is tormented: it is night when the party begins, dawn when Sally crashes through a window and escapes, and late afternoon as she is pursued down the road by Leatherface and his brother. All of this points to the concept of repetition as an element of the void which

²⁵Peary, Cult Films, p. 348.

encompasses the world of the film. Repetition can be seen here in the traditional sense of a refusal to confront obsessional behavior, as a means of covering up or preventing a cathartic process from taking place. The ritual violence of the film has important implications when considered against the backdrop of repetition on a broad social level, as a form of collective experience.

I have spoken of the cannibalism of the film (which is never actually seen, pointing to the metaphoric value Hooper gives to the idea) as representative of a process of inverting all values, myths and symbols of a culture. The cannibals' meal, rather than a communion, suggests the utter fragmentation and atomization of society. The most ferocious of the group, Leatherface, is, like Franklyn, the subject of constant torment and humiliation. The perpetual harangue that makes up the cannibals' conversation (the old man's famous "Look what your brother did to that door!") refers in its reflection of the average family to the animosity and terror prevailing in American life, often covered over by expected fripperies of social institutions. We do not fully understand the blood ties of the cannibals, except that Leatherface is brother to the hitchhiker; grandpa and grandma can hardly be distinguished from the rest of the gruesome artifacts filling the house. The older man of the group is presumably the father but this is never made clear; it is certain that he is head of the clan and as such is another Old Man Clanton who sees his role almost solely in terms of defending the rights of his faction against poachers, city-slickers, and any other form of intruder. Like the terrible renegade criminals of folklore²⁶ the old man and his tribe become

²⁶Jay Robert Nash's book allows us to view this material against a long history of valorizing crime in America. Nash's reactionary political stance helps us to understand this valorization since the author removes the individual from any political/historical process.

recluses as they are regarded as people dangerous or obsolete to society. Even here Hooper's film is self-reflexive, reminding us how the alienation of such people is fetishized and even valorized by popular culture. Alienation itself becomes an accepted state of being, psychopathology ennobled.

The clan construct reminds us that the story takes place in Texas, a state brimming with folklore and the key signifiers of the frontier experience: the Alamo, Davy Crockett, cattle drives, frontier justice, Indian wars. Again there is inversion; Leatherface's mask is of human skin, not bearskin. If Leatherface's mask (which is certainly a prominent piece of the film's iconography) is an extremely pathological fetish it is so because of the perverse ritualism of the film. In trying to rekindle primeval time and the savage origins of history, the fetishism of the film recreates the lampshades of Buchenwald rather than the knife scabbards and jackets of Daniel Boone. Instead of early America's epic conjunction of Culture with Nature, the cannibals' fetishism represents the total refusal of participation in the object-world. (It is worthwhile to note that the fetishism of the Nazis was part of a new tribalism and an attempt to summon up the gods of a primeval world.) In art one connotation of the mask is the adoption of a persona signifying specific identity in terms of its relationship to the overall group. Georges Bataille has pointed out, however, that the mask can also be a symbol of chaos and the breakdown of social order, a denial of the "open face" of human exchange.²⁷ Leatherface's mask does not have the social function of some ritual acts; it merely serves to cover up and to terrorize by reminding the spectator of corruption, the degra-

²⁷ Georges Bataille, "Le Masque," Oeuvres Completes (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), II, pp. 403-406.

dation of the flesh, disease, insanity, death. The mask signifies the cannibals' distance from their own acts, a fact first represented in their insanity. Their total immersion in the chaos of violence prevents them from seeing any end-product of their action. Since there is evidence that the violence of the story has occurred many times earlier, there is an explanation (metaphorically) for the insanity of the cannibals in the basic notion of repetition as a process of flight.

The terminal states fetishism can reach is emphasized also in the "saving" of Grandpa as a human fetish, a living corpse who is kept around as a reminder of the old days before the new transformation of labor. Grandpa is remembered as the best killer in the slaughterhouse ("Nobody could beat Grandpa"); there is no irony that Grandpa, the wizened ruler of the wasteland, is given the job of killing Sally and drops the hammer. Actions constantly evaporate; the horror of the violence carried out is equalled by the comedic failure of the violence that shows the impotence of hunter and prey.

The film suggests that we "discover" something about America as Sally and her friends stumble upon the cannibal household. We are reminded that what takes place in this film occurs at an unusual time when the stars have taken on special characteristics. The civilizing spirit has run its course; its energies are depleted, its myths not only dead but inverted and forced to show the consequences of their motivating force. This is underneath Sally's shock as she falls into the artifacts and debris of the cannibals' livingroom. What is unnerving here is the implication that the purer moment of Culture, the epic moment of the American civilizing process, is revealed to have had from the beginning the seed of barbarism, and that this same seed is what made it work. We witness also

the implications underneath the "deliberate regression" to early culture lauded by Romantic art and so much an attribute of American myth.²⁸

Hooper's apocalyptic landscape is Texas, not Wisconsin. It is a desert wasteland of dissolution where once vibrant myth is desiccated. The ideas and iconography of Cooper, Francis Parkman, and Bret Harte are now transmogrified into yards of dying cattle, abandoned gasoline stations, defiled graveyards, crumbling mansions, and a ramshackle farmhouse full of psychotic killers. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre has perhaps become recognizable as a statement about the end-time of American experience simply because it jibes with the "diminished expectations" of the population in the 1970s and '80s. While Hooper suggests that there is no millennium or transition, the acceptance of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre as an apocalyptic work may be based on audience need to fulfill through its art a growing pessimistic inclination. This same inclination has already called for a massive criticism and deconstruction of mythology in general, a process continued in Hooper's film. It must be repeated that as we understand the apocalypse of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre by drawing on structural anthropology and such constructs as scapegoat killing, it is important to realize how much the film is a denial of such interpretation as it is a denial of ritual processes themselves. The comedic aspect of the film has always been perceived by critics and audiences, and it has been acknowledged that the comedy does little to deflate the terror of the work. Rather it suggests that the rules of the form (and of drama itself), providing as they do a comfortable sense of organization and closure, are delusory if art is supposed to "mimic" reality. The reality that Hooper's

²⁸The genealogy of this thinking is traced in Robert Harbison, Deliberate Regression (New York: Knopf, 1980).

art imitates is resistant to any rational ordering system; art can no longer be intellectual recreation through the contemplation of order. The idea of "redemption" that Occidental man has assigned to the spirit of art, underlined by the "great works" continuing the concepts of sacrifice and revivification of society, is parodied here, even if the parodical process is unconscious. The patently absurd reenactment of scapegoat killing (which indeed has a rough correlate in Apocalypse Now) in Hooper's film attests to the general paucity of myth and communal belief in the contemporary world.

III

Like Hooper's film, Wes Craven's Last House on the Left (1972) and The Hills Have Eyes (1977) project the idea that apocalypse, in Kermode's term, is immanent to experience. Craven's films suggest that apocalypticism is both a form of wish-fulfillment within society and a general situation brought about by the collective tendency to deny history and suppress truth. Craven's films, again like Hooper's, do not refer to the intervention of God in the world; unlike The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, however, they suggest that man is capable of facing a genuine revelation about himself and rebuilding a civilization by immersing, as Conrad would have it, in the destructive element. Although Craven's films seem to entertain a cyclical view of history and apocalypse as genuine revelation, his conclusions here are tentative at best. When we say that Craven's films convey the immanence of apocalypse, this is also to distinguish them from, say, the science-fiction films of the 1950s and '60s²⁹ where we have depicted worlds either

²⁹A good contrast is with Paul Willemsen, ed., Roger Corman: The Millennial Vision (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1970).

preceding or following a holocaust which usually suggest a cyclical view of history that is critical primarily of certain defects of human nature. Craven's films deny the possibility of the Great Event external to everyday human interaction that will serve to teach man the error of his ways and allow him to recuperate enough from his past way of life to begin again.

The Hills Have Eyes posits, like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, that the state of crisis represents a New Dark Age that is the proper characterization of contemporary society, and that the only way through the crisis period is to confront the dearth of old myth, the spiritual vacuum of the present, and the need to assert clarity over hysteria, superstition, and repression: a genuine apocalypse located first in the individual soul. Also like Hooper, Craven uses the icons and images of traditional myth to decorate the parameters of the spiritual void that preoccupies him.

Craven's interest in the myth he is describing and its relationship both to tradition and contemporary society is probably more deliberate than Hooper's. A graduate of the distinguished Writing Seminars at The Johns Hopkins University and a former college instructor, Craven began work in the low-budget cinema with an interest in translating his own experience of the Vietnam era and the moral confusion which began in that period, as well as his personal experiences of family life and growing to maturity in the 1950s and '60s. One writer has referred to Craven's work as "Vietnam horror movies like Romero's The Crazies, Bob Clark's Dead of Night, and Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now."³⁰ Just as Craven's films precede in their ideas the major "Vietnam films," they are dependent

³⁰See Tony Williams, "An Interview with Wes Craven," Journal of Popular Film and Television 8/3 (Fall 1980):10.

on the ground broken by The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, just as Hooper used Hitchcock's work as a precedent in the examination of "family horror."

Craven goes to greater lengths than Hooper in elaborating his central metaphor--the wasteland, which stands out prominently in his most successful film, The Hills Have Eyes. Craven's desert shares with Hooper's landscape the sense of utter dissolution and the onset of chaos, the principal attributes of the wasteland in mainstream apocalyptic art. But Craven's emphasis on aspects of the wasteland myth can be said to be more deliberate both in its specific comparisons to current social problems and the concentration on certain well-known components of the myth, such as the idea of a hero's journey toward some regenerative event (a concept to receive much more attention in the films of George Miller).³¹

The relevance of this myth to American folklore is treated satirically³² as Craven introduces his own "journey" theme in the story of vacationing ex-cop Bob Carter and his overbearing family traveling through a particularly unwholesome piece of Southwestern desert. Before the Carters enter into the narrative we meet Grandpa Fred, an old drunk who is about to close his gas station/scrapyard after forty years of service. He is visited by his granddaughter Ruby, a wild child who apparently has lived all of her life with a group of people in the wasteland and now wishes to accompany her grandfather to civilization. Fred berates Ruby for her foolish suggestion, says she "can't even eat with regular folks" and will certainly bring down the wrath of "old Jupiter and the pack." We discover that Ruby is part of a tribe of feral people who claim the desert hills

³¹See Tony Williams, "Family Horror," Movie 27/28 (Winter 1980/Spring 1981):117.

³²Williams, "An Interview with Wes Craven," pp. 13-14.

as their kingdom and live off the supplies of an abandoned Air Force base and whatever they can loot from tourists. Unlike The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, we are given some solid background here as to the origins of this tribal wolfpack. When Bob Carter's trailer breaks down in the desert he goes back to Fred's filling station to learn that Grandpa Fred, a seemingly harmless old man, is himself responsible for the tribe and the tragedy that eventually besets the Carter family. Fred tells Carter that "back in '29, this place was spankin' new," as he and his young wife had their first child. The child was a monstrosity whose birth "almost tore little Nora apart." The child grew to manhood in a short period, had the strength and characteristics of an animal, brought terror to his community, and finally burned Fred's house to the ground, killing Fred's wife and young daughter. Fred woefully says "that monster kid wasn't even singed." When Carter reminds Fred that these events took place over forty years ago, Fred replies that this is "long enough for a devil child to become a devil man." Fred had abandoned the boy (whose given name we never learn) in the desert to die; somehow the boy survived as a feral child, eventually kidnapped a prostitute and spawned the hellish pack in the manner of the legendary cannibal of the Scottish Middle Ages, Sawney Beane. As Fred continues his account the gas station is set upon by his cannibal grandchildren and he is murdered as Carter escapes to the highway. Carter has a heart attack running back to his besieged family and is captured, butchered, and cannibalized by the tribe in a ritual manner.

The conversation at the gas station gives Fred the capacities of a prophet, since he is able to see dimensions to acts scoffed at by Carter. Fred's account of the birth of his monster child "back in '29" (a very different age) introduces a sense of foreboding and clearly shows the tre-

mendous fear and guilt in Fred over the burden he carries--he would hang himself rather than face the anger of his lost son or grandchildren. The conversation between the two older men also helps establish the relationship of the past to the present, the unconscious sins of the father being visited on a disturbed and malevolent younger generation. There is some irony to Fred's reference to his station's origins at the golden time "back in '29"; the utopian moment is actually simultaneous with the crash of the American dream, and the sin visited on the children, as in García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, is the sin of forgetfulness.

A more transparent aspect of Craven's plot is the relationship of Carter's family to the feral tribe.³³ The Carters are ostensibly the civilizing force vs. the "triumphant barbarism" of the pack. Yet, as Craven has himself asserted, the tribe represents a dark undercurrent in the Carters, a reflection of what is boiling beneath the surface in their routine and unhappy lives.³⁴ Beyond this, we are asked to view the Carter family as another tribe, with the same characteristics and loyalties of a tribe. In this way the family cannot be seen as the foundation of society, but as a splinter faction preoccupied with its own territory and self-interest. The essential comparison Craven draws between the two clans is the ability of Bobby and Brenda (Carter's son and daughter-in-law) to fight back and revel in the destruction of their enemy. If their brutality is equal to that of the wolfpack, so is their distance from and contempt for the society around them.

Brenda is anxious to get to California, land of "movie stars and fancy cars." Bobby views the entire desert as a "litter dump"; while

³³Ibid., pp. 13-15.

³⁴Ibid.

Carter supposedly feels at home in the wilderness, Brenda says the outdoors makes her "want to puke" because it "gives [her] the creeps." The Carters are more barbaric than the tribe since they are both distant from their own society and divided against each other. An atmosphere of bickering saturates all their conversations and precipitates the car crash that leads them to their final crisis.

Part of Craven's satire is involved in his equation of the Carters with the pioneer settlers of folklore and the traditions of the American Western. They are traveling to California in a trailer, the modern day equivalent of the covered wagon and, as Tony Williams has noted,³⁵ a new symbol of the affluent middle-class that figures prominently in other films, including Race with the Devil. Instead of crossing the New Golden Land the Carters cross a desert scrap heap, and their vision of California corresponds to the vision Nathanael West had of people who bastardize that aspect of the American Dream. The pioneer equation is seen too in the figure of Carter ("Big Bob" as his family affectionately refers to him). Carter prides himself on his years battling "hillbillies and niggers" on the streets of Cleveland and is pleased with the red-white-and-blue .357 Magnum revolver given him on his retirement from the department. As a modern lawman Carter sees himself as embodying all the virtues of the sophisticated, street-wise cop together with the rugged self-reliance and common sense of a latter-day frontiersman, an incarnation of the Westerner in nineteenth-century American fiction. But Carter is an incompetent who crashes his trailer out of negligence and who lives with constant resentment toward his wife, daughter, and son-in-law Doug.

Craven parodies also the rituals of pioneer life as portrayed in

³⁵Williams, "Family Horror," p. 126.

the Western, as when the Carters gather for a prayer before Bob Carter's search for help. Carter and the others accept the prayer grudgingly, only to appease Ma Carter, who is depicted as a cloying and soft-headed imbecile. She and her daughter Lyn die at the hands of the cannibals in a scene reminiscent of The Unforgiven or The Searchers; Craven here deflates the heroism of the scene, obligatory to early American melodrama, where death is the "right place to go" to idealize women or Indians. The Carter women die in a particularly brutal fashion because of the ineptitude of Bobby and Doug, and even in her death throes Ma Carter is full of banalities and delusions.

While the satire on the frontier myth could also be seen in the use of the feral tribe (they obviously figure on one level as Indians attacking the settlers), the real resonance of the tribe works through a mythopoeic process of combining images. Each male member of the clan is named after a Roman god; the head of the tribe is Jupiter ("Papa Jupe"), his three sons are Mars, Mercury and Pluto. There is no question that Craven wants them to appear as products of the frontier myth, a deracinated group of scavengers living off the carcass of a dead civilization. Of greater significance here is our earlier introduction of Jupiter as the "devil child" who mysteriously appeared to kindly Fred and his farmgirl bride back in 1929. There is no concrete explanation for Jupiter's aberrant birth; although nuclear waste, missile testing sites, low-flying jet planes and military dumping grounds are referred to throughout the film, they can have no connection to genetic mutation since Jupiter's birth occurred long before the inception of this technology. Rather, Jupiter's appearance seems to be linked to traditional myths of the arrival of Satan, and, coextensively, to the idea that Jupiter is the hypostatization of a funda-

mental spirit operating in frontier myth: he is "regeneration through violence" incarnate.

The world of The Hills Have Eyes, like that of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, is involved in barbaric regression. The apocalypse of Craven's film is extreme (despite the tenuous note of optimism at the end) because it not only denies revelation, it suggests that history is running in reverse and that the notion of progress idealized in much American art is unfounded. This point is clearly developed by the relationship of the barbaric tribe to the nuclear/military wasteland that is their territory. On this landscape parodies of the violent confrontations of ancient myth are carried out in the clan warfare between Jupiter's tribe and the Carter family.

As in Thyestes, it is not enough that the enemy be vanquished; the spirit of revenge calls for the adversary to be reminded of his own barbarism through mutilation and cannibalism. As Jupiter devours the remains of Bob Carter he stares at the charred cadaver and growls: "You made sport of my blood, you pig...now I'm gonna kill your kin." The scene echoes traditional clan warfare through Jupiter's overpowering, demonic presence, which we have been conscious of from the early warnings of Grandpa Fred that Jupiter was an omniscient force ruling the wasteland, as when Fred tells Ruby "there'll be hell to pay now" when she wishes to accompany Fred into civilization. The mythic aspect to the warfare is seen also in the sense that Bob Carter is a rival adversary to Jupiter rather than a victim; in fact, there is little to indicate that the Carters are innocent or helpless enough to qualify as victims. When Jupiter calls Carter "pig" it is not simple invective or '60s rhetoric aimed at the power structure. We already know that for the cannibal tribe animals are not

differentiated from human beings, each creature being either a rival or a means of satisfying a desire. Examples are Mercury's reference to Bobby's dog as "damn pig" and Ruby's mother drooling over another stray dog as a "great big stud." Irrational undifferentiation is another quality of the apocalyptic situation.

Clearly the violence of these demon-like human monsters, with human and animal flesh both reduced to the common denominator of raw meat, signifies the inversion of civilization and an affront to common notions humanity has about the nature of death, particularly in terms of how it should be represented in art. The cannibalism of this film (and of the other horror films sharing the theme) denies the heroic element of death and the equally heroic quality to the act of burial. Although there is no valid evidence that cannibalism as such existed in Greek society, there is considerable evidence that the Greeks were aware of its moral and political meaning and the special connotations it gave to acts of violence. Eli Sagan notes:

When Achilles resorts to a cataclysmic funeral, to human sacrifice, talk of cannibalism and head-hunting, he is indulging in the customs of the Barbarian peoples who surround the Greek world. He is regressing not only to a more primitive psychological state; he is actually going back in cultural time.³⁶

It has bewildered some critics why audiences of young people laugh at the grisliest moments of The Hills Have Eyes and similar films. Aside from a release of tension, a means of distancing oneself from the film, there is the distinct sense that the conscious mind prefers to see what is being portrayed as ludicrous to the civilized sensibility. Bob Carter's murder and the kidnapping of the Carter baby from the trailer (along with ham-

³⁶Eli Sagan, The Lust to Annihilate: A Psychoanalytic Study of Violence in Ancient Greek Culture (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1979), p. 45.

burger, Coca-Cola, and canned goods) runs against expectations of what is supposed to happen to the human being as victim. These acts are made "real" by the very savage but more plausible rape and murder of Lyn and Ma Carter. Homer showed contempt for certain forms of violence as being symptomatic of barbaric regression in civilization; killing could continue on a massive scale so long as it was followed by heroic funerals, with the urge to kill rationalized and in some small sense sublimated. Such sublimation goes on in the life of Bob Carter, who revels in tales of how he waged war on counterculture types back in Cleveland while maintaining a peaceful suburban life. The attack by Jupiter and his tribe is the sublimation function gone awry; ultimately the cannibals are the demons of the unconscious crawling to the surface.

Even this construct is ambivalent, however, since the film acknowledges, in the tradition of classical art, the need for barbaric violence before a regenerative cycle can begin. We also find in the world of the Greeks (whose view of the role of violence in society has been far too idealized according to some critics³⁷) that the type of hate residing in barbaric violence--a hate that precedes the introduction of Eros (love) in the law--calls for the human being to be reduced to an object.³⁸ Annihilation and cannibalism in classical art involve the degradation and reduction of the human being to object status, a process that must take place before the return of rational consciousness to society. It may be suggested that the barbaric violence of The Hills Have Eyes shares the self-reflexive func-

³⁷See E.R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957). Dodds's work is significant in examining Greek art as a social document.

³⁸Sagan, The Lust to Annihilate, pp. 43-46.

tion of classical literature in demonstrating to a society the extreme behavior rising out of a civilization's self-image and need to displace aggression. Indeed, the motivating force behind Craven's film (according to his interviews) was the need to give voice to the displaced violence that found its way into Vietnam.

The classical analogy is useful here also to our understanding of the relationship of dénouement to the uses of violence in Craven's film. Divine intervention is a traditional way by which the Greeks saw a restoration of order to society as chaos prevails, a device viewed with derision by Euripides. The "cosmic" atmosphere that both Hooper and Craven develop in their films is violated by the ultimate lack of any supernatural presence or harmonizing influence. The classical theme of the world's descent into primitivism (underlined here by the tribe's tooth necklaces, animal-hide clothing, feathers and totems) as a precondition for entering into the sacred time of the gods is parodied, since these creatures with the names of gods are less than human beings. Jupiter's clan consists of congenital idiots (monstrosities) who are plainly presented as by-products of a deteriorating society. If these "gods" have any relationship to civilization (the Carters) it is the comparable relationship of the deity to Greek society, in the anthropomorphic projection of human qualities onto an exterior force. As society is seen as dying so too the gods die; civilization's collapse is not necessarily seen as caused by the death of the gods. Craven does not give a supernatural aspect to Jupiter's clan, but instead presents it as a victim and demon of an overall civilization. It is a demon in the sense that it is a projection of phobias and hidden aggression underneath the American self-concept. The narrative itself, depending as it does on conventions of the American Western, is involved in a constant process of

showing the effects of repression and self-deceit. Bob Carter is frightened by natural phenomena such as wind whistling through a coffee pot; Lyn is terrified by a spider (archetypal nightmare imagery) but refuses to discuss it; Bobby covers up the truth about the slaughter of his dog by Jupiter's tribe.

The process of ignoring or covering up the truth is emphasized by the importance Craven gives to dialogue. While the use of dialogue in this film is in marked contrast to Hooper, it is nonetheless involved in showing the breakdown of language, the approaching black void of meaning that verges on the absurd. The piling-up of trivial or meaningless words in conversations spoken at right angles has been discussed by Ihab Hassan as another traditional harbinger of apocalypse.³⁹ This has relevance to The Hills Have Eyes, where the breakdown of communication and the disruption of communal feeling in both Carter's and Jupiter's clans prefigure dissolution into chaos; the period of chaos is characterized by the accumulation of violent acts that have no positive function, which corresponds to the pent-up tension and frustrated aggression arising in a society where language fails. In one sense the comment on the disruption of domestic tranquility in The Hills Have Eyes has a broadly reflexive purpose; we cannot help but view the Carters against the backdrop of the image of the family in numerous television situation comedies, where the tension and conflict of the American family is normally displaced and smoothed away. Since the Carters are placed in a frontier setting a connection is being made to a continued misrepresentation of family life in

³⁹The study of the defeat of language in modernist literature is very dependent on traditional religious beliefs of the transformation of the spoken word signifying a time of chaos. See Ihab Hassan, The Literature of Silence (New York: Knopf, 1967).

American popular art from its origins. But rather than comment simply on the family, Craven uses it as a microcosmic focal point for a general dissection of American myth.

The note of optimism in Craven's apocalypse is ambivalent at best. Ruby, we learn early in the film, wants to break with the pack, but her cooperation with the Carters does not constitute any real self-recognition. Her desire to flee the desert seems based on some general curiosity about the outside world, or perhaps the simple desire for more of the trinkets Grandpa Fred has been supplying her. Ruby's rescue of the Carter baby is a moral act, but her murder of Mars is betrayal and fratricide even if meant as a rejection of barbarism and the past. There is little evidence that Ruby had much love as part of Jupiter's clan, but the squabbling of the clan is compared throughout the film with the discontent of the Carters. Ruby's acceptance by the Carter children at the end may signify the birth of a new world, but the question immediately arises as to what the young people have discovered. While Ruby has been humanized to a degree, the Carter children have been made more barbaric by the trauma of their war with Jupiter. The deaths of the senior Carters suggests that their children have become somewhat enlightened about the basic dissatisfaction in their lives, but their absorption in the war with the cannibals can be seen as much self-immolation as self-preservation; in this context self-destruction can be viewed as part of the psyche's attempt to provoke guilt and punishment when disturbing truths are revealed or when the alleviation of repression is attempted. The note of optimism at the end of The Hills Have Eyes is tempered by the image of a setting rather than rising sun. If a new society is about to begin, it will be without any of the coordinates of

the old world.

While Craven retains some ties to the literary and cinematic tradition that sees apocalypse as having regenerative function, his first two films clearly express the belief that barbarism has virtually overtaken society and that man's reasoning faculties are asleep. Like Hooper (and Nathanael West), he explores his terrain with great humor and cynicism, believing that whatever religious or humanistic ideas still remain in society are ultimately covert expressions of a wish for mass suicide. Nowhere is this more bluntly expressed than in his first film Last House on the Left, a work that has been praised, along with The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, as a breakthrough in the field of psychological horror. It is fair to say that Craven develops in this film themes he would explore in greater depths in The Hills Have Eyes,⁴⁰ including the violent undercurrent running throughout American life, the collapse of reason, and the clan warfare between two families, one "barbaric," one "civilized."

The most noteworthy aspect of Last House on the Left is its virtual shot-by-shot recreation of The Virgin Spring. Many critics have decried Craven's adaptation much in the way Leone's A Fistful of Dollars was dismissed for its facile use of Yojimbo. But Craven's film, like Leone's, makes purposeful use of the original material in the story of the pious Collingwoods' descent into savagery as they enact a brutal revenge on the sadistic murderers of their young daughter. The film has a parodical relationship to The Virgin Spring and to the medieval ballad that inspired Bergman's film. The parody and black humor present in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and The Hills Have Eyes operate here in defusing the fascination American audiences have had with European

⁴⁰Williams, "An Interview with Wes Craven," pp. 13-14.

mythology and art. In The Virgin Spring the innocent Karin is also a seductress whose love for her father Töre is noticeably Oedipal. The goatherds who rape and murder Karin, like the repulsive Stillo family of Last House on the Left, ultimately reflect the darker side of otherwise compassionate people as well as demonstrate humane and recognizable characteristics in themselves. Unlike Bergman's film, Last House on the Left does not attach any ritual or regenerative significance to the act of revenge. Bergman obviously tries to offer critical insight into the ritual flagellation Töre submits himself to along with his sense of mission as he avenges his daughter. Craven dispenses with this investigation altogether since he makes us aware from the beginning that he is dealing with a population obviously cut off from any deeply-felt religious or cultural tradition. It is the utter absence of the mystical threads of Bergman's early cinema that is so shocking when we realize the implications of Craven's dark satire of suburbia. Craven has us recall the sense of apprehension and cultural shock American audiences felt when confronted by European "art movies" in the staid cultural atmosphere of the 1950s. He seems to be chiding the audience that felt that had it not been for Bergman, Fellini, Buñuel, Truffaut, et al., America might have remained a cultural wasteland in the postwar years, dependent as it seemed to be on a European high culture for the last three decades. We are also reminded that the imported myths resurrected from this culture are pretentious in the modern context, something to captivate only the most unrestrained Romantic imagination. American society simply does not have the sense of common purpose needed to engender myth, and it cannot rely on alien or obsolete myths of a distant epoch.

Although he introduces in Last House on the Left his concern for

the explosive effects of repression (Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood's argument with their daughter about brassieres), Craven also shows that in a fragmented culture there is room for "sexual liberation" without any suggestion that reason, political and economic justice or morality have been restored; Mari's peace symbol necklace is counterbalanced by her fascination with the rock group Bloodlust. The Stillo family could be called "liberated" in Sadie's bisexuality and her sex acts with Weasel in their Cadillac convertible. Craven is describing a society of transpsychical breakdown, where the need to consume and to become either predator or victim eventually leads one to a void similar to what we encounter in Sade.⁴¹ Mr. Collingwood's violence and subsequent self-revulsion is his recognition of this void; Craven is deliberately noncommittal on whether this violence has had any purgative role. In fact, Craven suggests that the incipient need for calamity and self-destruction is the true motive for the violence, evidenced in the teenage girls' preoccupation with drugs, satanism and violent rock and roll.

Craven must be credited with a strong concept in Last House on the Left, but a careful dissection of this film is probably unwarranted. The reputation this film has garnered as a break-through work is not wholly deserved; even for a first feature film, Craven's work here is deeply flawed by amateurish acting, directing, and editing. To legitimize this work further would not be sensible, particularly given the lack of direction shown in projects subsequent to The Hills Have Eyes. This is

⁴¹Sade's writings are rather crucial to our understanding of secular apocalypse in literature. See Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature (1971; reprint ed., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), pp. 24-47. See also Georges Bataille, Literature and Evil, trans. Alastair Hamilton (New York: Urizen Books, 1973), pp. 83-109.

not to invalidate Craven, but our purpose after all is to examine particular works in terms of the evolving apocalyptic tradition in genre film. While Craven is probably not as preoccupied with apocalypticism as, say, Tobe Hooper, he is as sensitive to the nature of the crisis precipitating apocalyptic consciousness and has been able to render this crisis as successfully as his contemporaries who continue to inflect the theme.

IV

One of the most respected directors in the New Wave of the fantastique, David Cronenberg is also the filmmaker perhaps most aligned with the spirit of apocalypse in the modern horror film. Without question one of the most intelligent film artists of his generation, his sensitivity to the atmosphere of apocalypticism in contemporary art is the result of a general education rather than an immersion in a particular medium, as is often the case with many of the "movie brat" directors of the 1970s. Cronenberg, a Canadian with an educational background in both science and literature, has gone so far as to state that his works are not horror films in the terms usually associated with that genre, that he is interested in exploring ideas rather than shocking an audience, and that the broad mythic dimensions of his films only coincidentally place them in the horror genre.⁴² Although Cronenberg's four major films to date--They Came from Within, Rabid, The Brood, and Scanners--have received some very favorable critical recognition, they have been subject for hostile attack by Robin Wood, whose "return of the repressed" thesis of the modern horror film finds Cronenberg's films reactionary in their stance

⁴²Eldon Garnet and James Dunn, "Cronenberg," Impulse (Spring 1982):6-11.

toward sexual liberation. Oddly, Wood has also been the one to touch on the apocalypticism in Cronenberg's films, but, perhaps because of the negative critique, Cronenberg has remarked: "I don't want apocalypse in my life, I want epiphanies."⁴³

This disclaimer notwithstanding, we find in Cronenberg's work an extraordinarily rich body of mythic content that interfaces with apocalyptic thought. Cronenberg's films are unquestionably allegories focusing on a general crisis within society; it is equally obvious that he chooses to explain this crisis by drawing on the images and themes of tradition. Cronenberg's cosmology and world-view are often obscure, although the deep strains of a moralist are apparent on even a cursory examination. Although on the one hand They Came from Within, Rabid, and The Brood contain an apocalyptic spirit that is profoundly secular and pessimistic, there is in Scanners a developing humanist faith that also depends on religious conventions and a sense of spiritual regeneration, although too inadequately articulated to allow for any conclusion as to a changing direction in Cronenberg's work.

Cronenberg has somewhat baffled the critical audience with his appearance as both logical positivist and Romantic. In response to questions about the role of the scientist in his films and whether this character is inevitably doomed out of his own arrogance or tragic hubris, Cronenberg remarks:

You have to believe in God before you can say there are things man was not meant to know. I don't think there is anything that man is not meant to know. I just think there are stupid things that men shouldn't do. When you believe there is a certain law and order in the universe that affects man,

⁴³Paul M. Sammon, "David Cronenberg," Cinefantastique 10:4 (Spring 1981):23.

then you can believe that stuff. I don't happen to believe that, so it's hard for me to take it seriously.⁴⁴

Such statements suffice to show that Cronenberg is aware of some of the predominant concerns of his genre and involved also in addressing broad issues of contemporary society. He has made some equally significant statements on the traditional "cathartic" value of his work and the way he attempts to address the individual and collective unconscious.⁴⁵ The ritual and mythic aspects of his films will become clear, but it is important first to separate the mythic dimension of the world Cronenberg describes from that of directors like Hooper and Craven. Cronenberg, like his contemporaries, is interested in dredging up the mythic current repressed in modern society; he is involved in showing the workings beneath the surface of behavior within the post-industrial urban environment and how a sensitivity toward this mythic past can lead humanity toward some enlightenment if not salvation. The absurdity and unrelieved pessimism we see in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is tempered in Cronenberg's films by the presence of a rational consciousness the director projects onto several of his central characters. The "ludicrous catastrophe"⁴⁶ that consumes the urban landscape of most of his films is shown by Cronenberg to be surmountable if human rationality is allowed to intervene, which gives the force of reason a much more privileged position than is evident in most other current works of the genre.

It is important at this juncture to comment briefly on the nature

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁶This idea is developed in John R. May, Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), p. 34.

of Cronenberg's catastrophe, particularly in relation to the director's statements. Obviously Cronenberg is not dealing with the same landscape as found in Hooper and Craven; although barbaric regression becomes a subject in his films, Cronenberg is not concerned with this as the inevitable consequence of the civilizing process. Cronenberg views all political/economic interpretations of society as too simple-minded, as he does the view that a back-to-nature orientation is the only hope for post-industrial society. He aims equal skepticism at the Left's current arguments for political and sexual liberation, having little faith in the monomania that often grows out of programmatic responses to social problems. In short, Cronenberg's interest in "epiphany" is linked to a belief in the efficacy of rational consciousness in a society where technological change is gradually effecting a transformation of man. Cronenberg may mean to suggest by his use of epiphany a sense of beginning rather than an end; the evidence of his work itself, however, calls our attention to Northrop Frye's view of epiphany in art as the individual's downfall simultaneous with revelation, the sort of process often associated with anagnorisis.⁴⁷ Cronenberg's disclaimer on the subject of apocalypse seems associated with a defensiveness toward a critical sector, since catastrophe is not only a key part of his vision, it is a part that is delineated along traditional patterns. His often jaundiced view of humanity's ability to remake itself and his cynicism toward utopian movements is similar to Norman Cohn's view of millennialism as a mystical, hysterical cultism that finds its way into political reality and presents the death

⁴⁷Discussed in Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 203-206.

wish underneath apocalyptic thought.⁴⁸ This thinking indeed saturates his first three films as Cronenberg's skepticism concerning mass movements becomes one of his most recognizable themes. Cronenberg wants his cinematic cataclysms to become epiphanies for the viewer concerning the forms of obsession, the pathology and collective rage that threaten to engulf society.

One comparison useful here is with the work of William S. Burroughs, a conscious Cronenberg influence.⁴⁹ Like Burroughs, Cronenberg seems to be operating within a specific genre while obviously crossing into mainstream art (of course for Burroughs this operation is in reverse, since Burroughs only recently has been recognized as an innovator for science-fiction); Cronenberg simply uses the conventions of horror/science-fiction since they provide the only adequate language for the ideas that concern him. His most important relationship to Burroughs is his discovery of the horrific in the bleak everyday areana into which he enters: the media landscape, the multinational corporation, the surfeit of drugs and self-help cures in a population whose labor is devalued and transformed, the rise of "leisure industries" all figure in Cronenberg's depiction of a cultural vacuum. The prescience of the vision shared by Cronenberg and Burroughs is a continuation of the thinking of Aldous Huxley and the latter's insight that the new tyranny and subsequent destruction of mankind will be self-imposed and the consequence of a changing technology. Burroughs' and Cronenberg's attention to the cybernetic revolution fulfills Huxley's insight.

⁴⁸See Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

⁴⁹Sammon, "David Cronenberg," p. 29.

The self-imposed tyranny of the modern environment, advancing with the increased leisure hours and transformation of the middle-class, the rise of high technology and mass media are associated with an in-depth fragmentation of society, a mass heteronomy touched on in the theme of cannibalism in Hooper, Craven, and George Romero. Drugs, the media image, sexuality and pop psychology are tied in Cronenberg's films to Burroughs' earlier notion of the "fix," i.e., the rise of the addictive personality cultivated by dominant culture and the changing structures of power. Burroughs and Cronenberg view transformation in society as psychic rather than political; for them conventional Marxist interpretations of society must be re-evaluated as socialist movements are themselves defined in terms of changing technology, and the pragmatism of the new age tends to fixate on the effectuation of power within the constraints of technology, not on the perfection of ideological principles or abstract values. For Burroughs the new technological landscape is unredeemable; unlike T.S. Eliot (often a subject of satire in Burroughs), Burroughs does not see any hope in the revivification of old mythologies in the contemporary wasteland.⁵⁰ Cronenberg on the other hand regularly invokes traditional myth (and modern psychoanalytic interpretations) as a means of explaining interaction. Although he uses myth to explain rather than redeem society, there is in Scanners the presence of mythological structures suggesting a faith in myth to revitalize society and give energy to the construction of a new order.

Cronenberg's ultimate reliance on myth and his dismissal of conventional political analysis may have caused his rejection by some critics.

⁵⁰See Eric Mottram, William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), pp. 47-48.

In They Came from Within (1976), the story of how a scientist's "venereal parasites" wreak havoc in a high-rise apartment complex, Cronenberg creates an allegory of sexual liberation that has faced heavy criticism from the Left. On one level the narrative seems to show an outright rejection of sexual expression, equating the control of people by the fecal-like parasite with the increased randiness and polysexuality of the apartment house tenants. But Cronenberg's position on sexuality in the current environment finds more affinities in the thinking of Foucault and Jean Baudrillard than in Reich or Marcuse.⁵¹ Cronenberg proposes the notion similar to Foucault that the "criticism" of repression will be accepted and co-opted by power and ideology in order to give repression more credibility during an age when the public has increased leisure time, more access to information, and greater skepticism toward traditional conservative institutions.⁵² The sexual liberation movement then becomes a form of "inoculation" (Roland Barthes's term⁵³) whereby ideology is allowed to gain new credibility, and we discover that there is little relation between the destruction of sexual mores and political revolt. Sexuality becomes for Cronenberg a symbol of division, of the fragmentation and ultimate "zombification" of society (his first film has been compared to Romero's Night of the Living Dead).

⁵¹The crucial works in this debate are Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1-An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980). and Jean Baudrillard, "Fetishism and Ideology," in For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981). Baudrillard's and Foucault's ideas are a topic of discussion in Semiotext(e) 10.

⁵²See Sylvere Lotringer, "Sex and Decadence," Semiotext(e) 10, pp. 287-96.

⁵³See Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), pp. 41-43.

The central image for Cronenberg, the high-rise apartment complex, has already become recognizable to us for its reiteration of the Tower of Babel myth. They Came from Within opens in medias res with a bizarre murder and suicide we later learn were caused by the transmission of a parasite. A doctor kills a young girl (who looks very androgynous) with whom he had had a pedophilic relationship; both have contracted the parasite (which induces insanity) and both must die in order to stop a general plague. Yet the plague spreads with continued sexual liaisons of the tenants. It is only at the end that the parasite itself actually spurs on the intrigues; Cronenberg suggests that rationality has ceased in the wake of the ascendancy of biological impulse. The scientific mind, although guilty of precipitating the crisis, becomes the only restraint against general irrationality. Sexual exchange is no longer seen as a valid form of communication, the sexual couplings having no signification or common language, hence the chaos resulting in the Babel analogy. Although a community is formed by the zombieified tenants, this community has a relation to society only as a microcosmic model of the atomization caused by obsessional diversions perceived as liberation; in reality sex itself has been fetishized. Cronenberg here turns the tables on conventional science-fiction narratives that attribute catastrophe to overreaching intellectual ambition, since it is the defeat of rationality that gives reign to chaos in They Came from Within. This humanist view finds fullest expression in Cronenberg's most representative works to date, The Brood and Scanners. In both films the resurrection of ancient myth is clear, as is Cronenberg's introduction of an apocalypticism that would resonate throughout the genre.

Gilbert Murray has remarked that "Broadmoor Hospital is filled

with a thousand Medeas."⁵⁴ The attempt by critics of Murray's generation to bring psychological insight to the ancient myths--and to allow these myths to contribute to our understanding of personality--finds a popular audience in The Brood (1979), which coincidentally is a kind of retelling of the Medea myth.

Cronenberg's narrative centers on Nola Carveth, an extremely disturbed young woman under the care of Dr. Hal Raglan, founder of the Somafree Institute of Psychoplasemics and author of The Shape of Rage, a best-selling piece of self-help pop psychology. Nola was a victim of child abuse, brought about by a weak, diffident father and an overbearing, alcoholic mother. Nola's pathology has caused her estrangement from her husband Frank. Although she is a shut-in and a virtual specimen in Raglan's clinic, she retains strong and generally negative emotional ties to Frank and her daughter Candy. To Frank she is overwhelmingly jealous and suspicious; to Candy she is possessive and tending to project her own fears onto her. Raglan's therapy (which bears strong resemblances to Arthur Janov's "primal scream" therapy, est, and transactional analysis) calls for the patient to give vent to his/her "rage" by forcing a cathexis so severe as to produce physical symptoms. In this Raglan seems a reverse of Freud, who would diagnose a physical ailment as a symptom of repression or anxiety. For Raglan physical distress signals the start of a cure of mental disorder; in this Cronenberg inserts his sense of chaos arising out of the misdirection of reason and scientific discovery.

The result of Nola's rage therapy is her uncanny "brood," monster-children gestated in external sacs--resembling cysts--who be-

⁵⁴Gilbert Murray, Greek Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 126.

come Furies enacting revenge on Nola's perceived enemies (eventually her entire family) when she is infuriated. Frank's attempt to discredit Raglan includes his enlistment of a former patient whose therapy caused him to develop lymphatic cancer, making him want revenge on Raglan. Nola and the other Psychoplasms patients generate a metaphor for a modern plague; in its narrower sense the plague is pop psychology and its inability to expiate the genuine rage at the heart of civilization (we are reminded of the plagues of Artaud and Camus). Pop psychology is for Cronenberg another device brought about in the wake of a general transformation of humanity; the plague is the attendant collective psychological backlash rejecting this transformation.

The Brood recapitulates René Girard's notion that "violence, if left unappeased, will accumulate until it overflows and contaminates the surrounding area."⁵⁵ It has been suggested that Cronenberg is preoccupied with Descartes' mind/body dichotomy, a concern he develops fully in The Brood.⁵⁶ Nola is a caricatured representation of this dichotomy, and in this representation she is Medea, who also attempted to displace her rage in surrogate victims, her children. Nola is not concerned with stemming the rising tide of violence. In fact, her therapy and consequent violence are legitimizations of her pathology. The therapy Nola undertakes is a form of ritual magic rather than science, but as we learn from the role of ritual and myth in other horror films, such magic no longer has any purgative function, nor can it serve to unite a community.

There is a sense of universal victimization in The Brood not

⁵⁵Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 10.

⁵⁶Sammon, "David Cronenberg," p. 22.

unlike Jacobean or Athenian tragedy, but there are also some important distinctions. While in Medea (Euripides) Jason is an arrogant cad, Frank Carveth is a well-meaning dullard and Dr. Raglan, far from a mad scientist, is finally viewed as a courageous but short-sighted man whose hubris is caused by his obsession with his own theories compounded by his irrational attraction to Nola. The cohesion with Greek drama and traditional myth is in the figure of Nola, a victim-villain whose predicament is caused by forces going far beyond the narrative and her own control. Cronenberg's concrete base for this predicament is his metaphorical use of child abuse, a topic becoming increasingly important in the horror film. Nola gains revenge on her parents through her "brood," but she ends up transferring her pathology to her daughter, who in the last shot of the film is shown to develop the skin lesions found in the early phase of "rage therapy" (and can be associated here with child abuse as such). Child abuse is a key emblem of catastrophe in the horror film, suggesting an unending cycle of violence that cannot be expiated; it is an act that consistently refuses any ritual format associated with the diffusion of violence in civilized society. Child abuse figures as a deep current of violence that becomes completely auto-cannibalistic rather than sublimated and channeled into regenerative or creative uses. Nola repeats Medea's crisis perfectly in her entrapment by the psychological process of incorporation, and, like Medea, she shows how this situation has broad historical consequences. Nola incorporates into her being the form of oppression that once impacted on her. Eli Sagan remarks:

The victim of cruelty so easily becomes a perpetrator of evil because of this process of incorporation. Only the unconscious memory of one's childhood experiences with cruelty could make one conceive that the most appropriate way to revenge oneself on one's husband is to kill one's children. Medea is incapable

of distinguishing the hatred she feels for her husband from the emotions she experiences with her children. Husband, children, father, mother--all merge together in her mind. She kills them all, and herself, when she destroys her children.⁵⁷

This is an ideal summation of the situation in The Brood, and, like Euripides, Cronenberg points a finger not at his central figures but at an overall historical situation that produced the crisis, since his subject is self-perpetuating violence. Although he looks critically at the nature of the family, Cronenberg's greatest assault is on a popular culture that views a random attack on repression as a panacea for civilized man. The state of "permanent ecstasy" pop psychology suggests is for Cronenberg's humanism a preoccupation with the flesh associated with mass cultural diversion. He turns this diversion into iconography throughout his film signifying the "new age" environment: advertising, television, pop music, consumer goods, drugs, mysticism, and high fashion form an amalgam on the media landscape to show the destructive force of the libido, catered to by the atmosphere the quantum leap in technology has created. We are reminded of the end of Zabriskie Point, but Cronenberg's apocalypse involves a much more painstaking analysis of the technological environment itself rather than the imposition of a vague feeling of contempt.

In one privileged scene toward the end of The Brood Frank finally confronts Nola in an inner sanctum of Raglan's clinic. Seated on a raised dais, Nola opens her thin gown to reveal to a horrified Frank her hideously scarred torso and a remaining sac containing a "brood" foetus. She opens the sac with her teeth and cleans her offspring with her tongue, as a bitch cleans her whelp. This biological transmutation/

⁵⁷Sagan, The Lust to Annihilate, p. 147.

regression is an epiphany for Frank and the viewer; the repulsiveness of the act cannot be dissociated from Nola's beauty (the characterization by Samantha Eggar is remarkable) and Frank's attraction/repulsion, just as the viewer is compelled by the location of horror in individual pathology. The levels of sexual intrigue are many and complex, something that adds to a general sense of pathos; there is Raglan's relationship with Nola, Nola's relationship with Frank, Nola's projected affair between Frank and Candy's kindergarten teacher (who is murdered by the brood), and the destructive relationship between Nola's parents. Nola and her mother Juliana are particularly sexual women, but although liberated in their personal appetites, they are by no means beyond traditional jealousy, bickering, and resentment. With her piercing green eyes and fiery red hair, Nola is the incarnation of the Fatal Woman; her character reminds us how tradition has shown a period of free sexual expression to precede a holocaust, and the problems of the film suggest that a trans-psychical crisis precedes outright violence and upheaval.

Nola's depiction has led to the assertion that Cronenberg has located the evils of sexuality squarely in the predictable image of woman. But Nola's disease is the culmination of so much evil we are aware of an inherent danger to all human relationships. Cronenberg shows how each relationship in The Brood has a predatory or passive/aggressive cast. In the image of Nola's "brood" Cronenberg actually undercuts Freudian notions of the woman's possession of the phallus through pregnancy. Nola's brood enact physical revenge, but they are only figures for their mother's inability to exist without a constant cycle of violence and retribution. As Furies the brood children represent the blind and unending spiral of revenge, not the intervention of justice. When Nola "births"

her last child-monster she holds it up to Frank not as a threat but as a representation of the inner turmoil she would like physically to expunge from her body. When she delivers her last monstrosity she asks to be killed, and in her strangulation by Frank the brood infant is crushed. The horror of the sequence produces the greatest pathos of the film. We already know that Raglan has been killed by the brood in his last-minute recognition of how his scientific blunder has disrupted society. Nola's death and the evidence that her terror and self-loathing live on in Candy offers a pessimistic apocalypse beyond the cyclical views of primitive or secular thought. Cronenberg is asserting "epiphany" in his view that apocalypse is a delusory fixation of the individual who rationalizes a means of self-destruction when unable to accomplish change on a general basis, which places Cronenberg in the modern mainstream critique of traditional apocalypticism developed earlier. In extending his critique to encompass middle-class society, he decries the wish-dream aspect of apocalypse that is part of class consciousness, and becoming increasingly debased; *Psychoplasms* is a promise of millennium for the characters of The Brood as the dream of Moscow was for characters of Chekhov. Cronenberg asserts that the catastrophe needed to provoke revelation does not come, and that the terror of life continues because of inadequacies of the human intellect. There is no hint of intervention, divine or otherwise, in The Brood, but in Cronenberg's next film he places more trust in his belief that the intellect and basic human virtues may still provide hope for society.

The bifurcated nature of man and the impossibility of his survival in the technological setting are developed to a very refined extent in Scanners (1981). The themes of rampant violence, betrayal, disease, and

interfamily warfare are so pronounced and privileged in this film as to give it an apocalypse drawn very much on Biblical and classical lines. It is Cronenberg's most formal examination of the dilemmas of technological society within the contexts of history and mythic tradition.

Scanners deals with an underground of young people with extraordinary telekinetic ability, so strong that they can literally burst the skulls of their enemies with a concentrated mental assault. With its good brother/evil brother construct, the mental warfare of Scanners gains an extra dimension through its reliance on archetypal themes of fraternal rivalry and interfamily conflict we find in a host of American genre films, including Winchester 73 and Man of the West. Cameron Vale is a destitute young man who wanders shopping malls until he is forced by others into a full self-discovery centered on his ability to "scan." He is befriended by Dr. Paul Ruth ("little pity"), a research psychologist for a transnational security agency called ConSec. Ruth has for some reason been surveilling Vale for some time, and rationalizes a kidnapping by claiming Vale was "human junk" before his recruiting by ConSec. Ruth is trying to reassemble all the Scanners, who were produced during the postwar baby boom in a massive and dangerous experiment with a drug called Ephemerol, sold to pregnant women in the 1940s as a mild tranquilizer. Ephemerol produced the extraordinary telekinetic powers of the full-grown Scanners, truly products of a drug generation. Some of the Scanners have turned bad and become hired assassins in the international corporate/intelligence community; included in the group is Darryl Revok, Vale's lost brother. Revok is shown early on to be a dangerous psychotic unable to control the rage produced by his especially acute mental ability; during his government-sponsored institutionalization he attempted

to drill through the center of his forehead to relieve the tension of voices provoking him to violence--the resultant scar from the self-mutilation has the effect of a "third eye." Revok's messianic complex causes him to organize a rebel Scanner faction wagging a revolt against the government and the government-affiliated ConSec organization. Cameron Vale is forced to penetrate the rebel group and assassinate Revok, who is revealed to be Vale's brother only at the last moment of the story.

Like Burroughs, Cronenberg builds an elaborate mythic structure into a conventional horror/sci-fi framework. The mythic aspect gives the political/social resonances of the narrative a force and perspective similar to Apocalypse Now. This similarity is not superficial or incidental; it demonstrates a tendency to see epic and archetypal dimensions of contemporary crises and to understand these dimensions in terms of the myth of apocalypse. The apocalypticism of Scanners shares with Coppola's film and the other works thus far discussed the belief that ancient myth is bankrupt and in need of reinvigoration, and that a system of language has become fragmented, arbitrary, and devoid of meaning, thus destroying the union of society. Cronenberg locates this crisis squarely in the dehumanizing features of the modern world. The ConSec organization is part of a new elitist conception of society dominated by clandestine and faceless supranational forces. The ConSec logo is borrowed from the Trilateral Commission, and we are reminded of the interchange between CIA/military intelligence and the corporate sphere. The sense of anxiety produced by the blurred, indistinct but thoroughly terrorizing nature of modern power saturates the complexion of this film. Ephemerol, the drug used to create and tranquilize the

Scanners, could communicate as an idea only at a time following the Thalidomide tragedies, the rise of the Valium age and the legitimizing of anesthetization to experience. That Ephemerol was used by government in the postwar years to create the race of Scanners (which we first learn through a piece of 1940s Life magazine advertising resembling the kitsch art of Nazism) refers not only to specific biochemical experiments of the CIA's MK-ULTRA program,⁵⁸ but to the much larger notion that the explosive reaction that set in with the generation of the '60s and '70s was the consequence of the trauma of World War II, the birth of the nuclear age, cybernetics, the transnational corporate state, and a world caught between two aggressive power blocs. Ephemerol's reference to the drug counter-culture is seen also in the more subtle idea that what produced the Scanners becomes an addiction for them. A good deal of contemporary evidence suggests, after all, that the power structure itself deals in drugs and produces its own subculture.

The original title to Cronenberg's script was The Sensitive,⁵⁹ and the character of Cameron Vale suggests the difficulties encountered by an impressionable temperament trying to survive in the new environment. Vale's arrest by ConSec agents as he roams through a shopping mall, his telekinetic attack on two snooty matrons making disparaging remarks, and Dr. Ruth's reference to Vale as "human junk" become central to Vale's gradual emerging as a representative figure of alienation

⁵⁸This topic has become a subject of increasing investigation since the findings of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence were published in 1976 (available from the Government Printing Office). Some important works to follow this investigation were John Marks, The Search for the Manchurian Candidate: The CIA and Mind Control (New York: Times Books, 1979), and Walter Bowart, Operation Mind Control (New York: Dell Books, 1978).

⁵⁹Sammon, "David Cronenberg," p. 31.

and as a martyr who will sacrifice himself to destroy the image of the New Man envisioned by corporate culture. Vale's transformation into messiah is evident also in his process of growth and self-recognition--at first he is not aware of how his great power makes him superior to other men.

One of Vale's contacts in his search for Revok is Pierce, another Scanner renegade who channels the pressure and anxiety of his mental abilities into works of art. The sculptures, images that recall Auschwitz or the works of Francis Bacon, are exhibited in chic galleries which Pierce never enters, suggesting society's ability to absorb, dilute, and ignore significant ideas. The film details Pierce's alienation from the art world itself and his relationship to his work strictly as a kind of therapy. Cronenberg comments on the grotesque and unfulfilling forms that sublimation can take, even when it becomes legitimate art "recognized" by society. Pierce's loneliness, his inability to be consoled even by his brother Scanner, points to the phenomenon of scanning as a metaphoric device for a range of psychological disruption.

The term "scanning" derives from television technology and the media environment, suggesting the human brain's competition with advanced information systems, but in its realization here scanning refers to specific social ills. Scanners shares with Brian de Palma's The Fury the idea that unusual mental capacities, such as telekinesis or extrasensory perception, must be seen as afflictions rather than special gifts. The association of scanning with the physical symptoms of high blood pressure becomes clear as Scanners bleed from the nostrils during the early moments of a psychic "duel." The convulsions that a Scanner victim (or assassin) goes through and the literal explosion of the victim's body are metaphoric extensions of high blood pressure and stroke, reified by medical practice

and the media into two of the worst "killers" threatening society. The rage that boils within the Scanners' hypersensitive consciousness and must vent itself in self-mutilation or murder continues Cronenberg's allegory of illness as metaphor in contemporary life. Bodily fixations are important to Cronenberg's three previous films: They Came from Within views the political aspect of sexual revolution with great cynicism; Rabid gives a similar critical eye to obsessional behavior, suggesting outright that sexual revolt can serve the interests of power; The Brood makes associations between psychopathology and cancer, suggesting that cancer itself is accepted as a given in mass society and, ironically, is part of the only commonly shared and concretely realized mythic belief pattern extant. The references to specific illness do not diminish the mythic aspect of Cronenberg's work. Rather, they tend to demonstrate the origins of myth in the profane world, and how psychoanalytic criticism utilizes myth in explaining behavior.

In Scanners the renegade Revok is a daemon, a tragic figure in his torment brought about by his incredibly potent abilities and his revolt against the established order. A Miltonic flavor occurs in Revok's war against the father, as we learn that Dr. Ruth spawned both Revok and Vale during his Ephemerol experiments and abandoned them until their value to counterintelligence became clear. Like Coppola's version of Kurtz in Apocalypse Now, Revok creates his own cult as a reaction to the amoral logic of power. Revok's underground (called in the original script the "Church of Materiology"⁶⁰) recalls Scientology, the Moonies, and Jim Jones in the pathetic and suicidal nature of its monomania and

⁶⁰Phil Edwards, "Inside Cronenberg," Starburst, Vol. 3, No. 12, p. 36.

distance from the rest of society. Vale, like Coppola's Willard, undergoes a transformation as he comes to identify with Revok, particularly when he discovers his blood ties. Also like Willard, Vale realizes that his brother's dementia ultimately embodies the perspective and methods of the oppressor, in a caricatured, hyperbolic form.

Vale (and the viewer) realize that the solidarity of the Scanner group represents a coherent ideology that is missing in the far more organized and systematic world of ConSec--ConSec can be thought of as the "profane" world vs. the spiritual force and solidarity of the Scanner population. An atmosphere of gangsterism and betrayal prevails at ConSec as the corporation is eaten away from within rather than destroyed by the renegade enemy. The duplicity rampant in ConSec is best seen in Keller, a ConSec executive whose contempt for the intellectual Dr. Ruth causes him to be a tool of Revok. When Revok orders Keller to assassinate Ruth he contemptuously uses Keller's CIA jargon to "terminate with extreme prejudice" (the same order Willard gets to murder Kurtz). The visionary Revok spurns the hypocritical morality of ConSec and language that obscures truth. But Revok's rage against the "profane" world is so extreme he is unable to see the contradictions of his own logic and morality. While Dr. Ruth unintentionally stumbled upon the phenomenon of scanning during his drug experiments of the 1940s (like Hoffman's discovery of LSD-25), Revok wishes to use Ephemerol to create a master race of Scanners that will rule the world--a Scanner millennium. Revok's scenario and his attempt to maintain a superior morality in the face of the corporate pragmatism that produced him become transparently hypocritical. Revok waxes lyrical about a future society that is beyond the corruption and convoluted reasoning of ConSec, but his own vision of a New Man is a

fabrication, an amalgam of ideas similar to the "ice cosmogony" and transmogrified Nietzschean maxims of the Nazis.

Revok's vision is thoroughly apocalyptic. He senses the moral bankruptcy of the present world and its dissolution into chaos. His call for a new and harsh morality based on the shared vision of the Scanner underground suggest the attempt to accelerate the disintegration in order to effect change. Vale is repulsed by the plan to wipe out the corrupt "normal" world, the main feature of Revok's program. Revok's view is that the current civilization cannot be rehabilitated in any form, its corruption and hypocrisy suggesting an utter absence of conviction and shared purpose. The Scanners represent for Revok a purer alternate society by their unspoken and therefore more sublime "language"; it is both a means of communication and a tangible physical bond. The communion represented in the Scanners seems based on most Romantic conceptions of language, since thought remaining as pure feeling, uncorrupted by realization in the spoken word, would be the ideal communication were man not hampered by the encumbrance of the flesh. Conception would then be possible without the mediation of signs, one of the goals of mysticism. Revok's apocalypse is therefore almost Blakean in his vision of the Scanners as angels beyond the limitations of earthly experience.

Vale's final confrontation with Revok is the apocalyptic moment, one that contains an elaborate ritual of scapegoat sacrifice. It is apocalyptic first in Vale's realization of his kinship with Revok, provoking more internal turmoil since Vale has already perceived Revok's latent morality and wisdom, suggested in Revok's "third eye." Revok's early self-mutilation was the Stoic gesture of turning violence inward that should not be unleashed on society; the attempt to release the pressure

of heightened consciousness suggests the first stage of rejection by a small, elite group of the banal and relatively insensitive external world. Throughout the film the comparison is made between the "good" and "bad" Scanners and a colony of priests, poets, and philosophers. In being forced to acknowledge his relationship to Revok, Vale is also asked to confront his tacit complicity in the old order. Revok reminds Vale that they were the first of their generation, and they will always be superior to the succeeding generations of Scanners Revok will produce. Vale snaps to the fact that he and Revok are only the culmination of an evil, dehumanizing era now coming to a close, and that their alienation from society signifies their roles as projections of that evil. Vale also understands that he and Revok must be destroyed to bring a new cycle in time.

The final Scanner battle is cosmic, with smoke coming from the two men's bodies, eyes popping, flesh boiling, blood spurting from veins. At one instant Vale tears flesh from his face--his own Stoic gesture--and holds his burning up-turned palms to his older brother in a stance of religious supplication. In trying to stop his demented brother Vale is burnt to a cinder by his brother's superior mental power, but in the last moment Vale's "soul" survives and propels itself into the mind and flesh of Revok. The final scene is one of transcendence, a marriage of Heaven and Hell.⁶¹ It is unclear, however, if Cronenberg means this to represent the start of a new historical cycle. Although Vale has earlier destroyed the ConSec computer (containing the names of all Scanners plus future scenarios of corporate intelligence) in a will-testing struggle of

⁶¹The scene is referred to as such in the novelization by Leon Whiteson, with which Cronenberg apparently had some involvement (New York: Tower Books, 1980), p. 202.

mind vs. machine, and has also eliminated most of the ConSec executives through Scanner assault, it is by no means certain whether these "sensitives" will be able to live in the remains of the old society, let alone build a new one.

There is no question that Cronenberg tries to give his philosophic concerns full elaboration in Scanners. The film helps to establish our contention of the horror film's unity with other genres in its sense of apocalyptic myth as a pervasive pattern of belief, and the continuity of this pattern with tradition. Cronenberg's idea of the human being divided against him/herself and humans divided against each other in the contemporary world finds its origins in basic religious belief, and it is this particular feeling that has pertinence to the new apocalyptic spirit running through art and society. This pronounced sense of division and ambivalence is the spring that makes Cronenberg's mythic devices work. Although Revok's revenge against ConSec and the corporate world has some base in morality, it is still revenge, and as such is repetitive, self-perpetuating violence wherein the oppressed identifies with the means of the oppressor.⁶² The sense of frustration brought about by this dilemma refers to the development of the mythic situation touched on earlier.

The struggle of Revok against ConSec is one of son against father, occurring simultaneously with the fraternal conflict between Revok and Vale. What appears then is not only revenge but another instance of blood feud, or the reappearance of the mythical internecine warfare that brought forth creation out of chaos.⁶³ The appearance of this form of

⁶²See Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 147, *passim*.

⁶³The concept refers again to the work of Eliade, particularly The Sacred and the Profane and Cosmos and History.

violence is a serious threat to civilization in its ability to reveal the links between uncontrolled cycles of revenge and ritual sacrifice; since sacrifice has been incorporated by civilized man into the rule of law, any form of violence that may show society's remaining infirmities and connections to barbarism cannot be tolerated. This link must be covered up also if ritual is to have any efficacy, and in Cronenberg's world, as in Coppola's, this efficacy is in serious doubt. The link between the civilized and barbarous worlds is revealed in the existence of ConSec, but the sacrifice of Revok, while it works as a symbol of rejuvenation of society, also figures as the rejection of myth, since in many respects the Scanners embody the best aspirations and accomplishments of an era.

The theme of rival brothers is central to Cronenberg's vision, beyond the general reference to the mythological conflicts of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Eteocles and Polyneices. By making the central contest of the story familial, Cronenberg is able to build a structure suggesting the connections of the specific event to the world at large, a basic function of myth. The relationship of Revok and Vale also reminds us of the shared patriarchy of brotherhood. When brothers fight it is usually associated with an attempt at the throne, and although one or both brothers may have a vision distinct from the past, the role they enact connects them to the old world.⁶⁴ Dr. Ruth is an almost Lear-like figure, particularly at the point when he is murdered by the ConSec conspirators, but Cronenberg is clear in showing the connection of both Ruth and his disenfranchised sons to an evil age. Revok is ultimately demon and scapegoat, on whom all evil is projected and whose elimination will assure society's continuation on an even keel. Vale's "merger" with his brother

⁶⁴Girard, Violence and the Sacred, pp. 61-65, passim.

at the telekinetic showdown is our recognition of Vale as a "monstrous double"⁶⁵ who cannot be differentiated from the enemy. At the end we hear the gentle voice of Vale, but we see the tortured face of Revok. As stated, this final image presents the greatest ambiguity in Cronenberg's film.

The idea of apocalypse Cronenberg advances points to the primitive recognition of a spiritually fallow period, when violence must be channelled and transformed in such a way as to restore order. One earmark of this crisis is the need to restore balance between differentiation and unity. Society must share a common language and a single, epic purpose if it is to avoid dissolving into the Tower of Babel condition. While the atomization of society is to be avoided, the opposite danger of a lack of differentiation is also undesirable since it suggests that the individual is reduced to an object and makes the operation of language impossible; one quality of sacred time is its lack of differentiation.⁶⁶ The complexity of this situation is revealed in the world of ConSec and its technology. Although cybernetics and the transnational scope of the new communications and intelligence networks may suggest the community of the global village, the world of clandestineism and internal subterfuge and betrayal at ConSec reveals that this elite language system is no communication at all. And the blurring of the human being into cybernetic technology adds further emphasis to the unity/differentiation imbalance. The inability of society to perceive the nature of mythic structures is a subject to be dealt with in some detail in relation to Coppola; suffice it to say that the evidence of Scanners shows Cronenberg's belief in a spiritual vacuum,

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 143-168.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 49-52, 55-57, 127-129.

even though Cronenberg claims he examines his world from a strictly secular perspective. The violence and imbalance in society evidenced by the rage of the Scanners must be expiated. The rage is only a symptom of the crisis, however, although it is viewed by many of the protagonists as a cause. The deaths of Revok and Vale suggest that equilibrium has not been restored, or if it exists it does so only for a tiny faction totally alienated from society.

What unites Cronenberg's work to Hooper's and Craven's is the basic recognition that nothing can relieve the current crisis, and that violence has no mythic or restorative function. By calling on specific mythic images, Cronenberg seems to be suggesting, perhaps grudgingly, that the loss of any mythic dimension may have provoked crisis. Cronenberg's films are, like Hooper's and Craven's, about devolution and barbaric regression, but they suggest that the attempt to cover up this regression may be extremely subtle and profound. The world of Scanners is the traditional science-fiction dystopia, but one where the enemy has been found in human nature itself rather than some small defect of the mind or the created world. Vale's sacrifice at the end of Scanners gives some small ray of hope for the continuation of history, but whether or not the evidence of Vale's remaining humanity can be incorporated into the rest of society is uncertain.

Postscript

...A sender has to send all the time. He can never receive, because if he receives that means someone else has feelings of his own that could louse up his continuity. The sender has to send all the time, but he can't recharge himself by contact. Sooner or later, he's got no feelings to send. You can't have feelings alone. Not alone like the sender is alone--and you dig there can only be one

sender at one place-time...Finally the screen goes dead... the Sender has turned into a giant centipede...So the workers come in on the beam and burn the centipede and elect a new Sender by consensus of the general will.... The Mayans were limited by isolation....Now one Sender could control the planet....You see control can never be a means to any practical end....It can never be a means to anything but more control....Like junk.

-- William Burroughs

I think of human beings as a strange mixture of the physical and the non-physical--both of these things having their say at every moment we're alive. I start thinking that what I'm doing isn't a horror film at all. It's some kind of strange metaphysical passion play or something.

-- David Cronenberg

As this writing began, David Cronenberg's most recent film, Videodrome (1982), went into general release. While it is usually not the province of scholarly writing to "update" remarks on an artist (particularly one whose career is just beginning), there are so many aspects of Videodrome which continue and expand upon Cronenberg's earlier work that a few remarks are appropriate. There is little question that Videodrome is Cronenberg's most sophisticated work to date. It is distressing that his adventurous intellectualism has alienated sectors of his horror-sci-fi following and brought on accusations of pretension from media reviewers (Videodrome quickly became a commercial and critical failure, although it is certain eventually to gain respect as an innovative work based on its already apparent cult following).

Cronenberg, the professed atheist, continues a Romantic fascination with questions of transcendence. The underground religious cult, the spiritual guru, and the concept of death leading to rebirth are themes appearing in this film obvious also in Scanners. While Cronenberg, like

Burroughs, refuses to give his work a precise political context, Videodrome is especially noteworthy for some political themes also visible in his earlier work: the relationship of corporate to political power; the transformation of humanity effectuated by the cybernetic revolution; the ways by which tyranny achieves a democratic face; the ability of the current power structure to cause the human being actually to demand his/her own servitude through the seduction of technology.

Cronenberg has not yet achieved Burroughs' recognition as a prophetic artist, yet his five major films to date, while all operating in a mythopoeic mode, offer specific insights on contemporary dilemmas.

Videodrome is his most topical film, using the burgeoning video industry as a starting point in the elaboration of a pessimistic vision of a technological epoch that is in fact a New Dark Age.

In this film Max Renn is the head of Civic TV-Channel 83, a small-time cable company specializing in softcore pornography and unpurgated mainstream cinema, precisely the fare offered by most current cable TV franchises. Renn is an unsavory, utterly pragmatic hustler, always on the make for new ways to expand his market. He participates in rendezvous at cheap hotels to buy pornographic video cassettes; he hires freelance entrepreneurs--including a faded actress named Masha--to find new material; he holds regular board meetings with his two equally unscrupulous partners on the possibility of attracting new audiences with yet more daring programming. Essential to Renn's operation is Harlan, a wiz-kid technician who pirates the signals of innumerable international broadcasts through Civic TV's illegal satellite dish. A turning point occurs when Harlan captures the signal of a program called "Videodrome."

"Videodrome," a broadcast apparently originating in Malaysia, is a bizarre set-piece showing various young people being tortured and killed by two hooded thugs in an electrified room lined in blood-red tile; there is no camera movement, editing, or narrative. Renn is immediately captivated when Harlan introduces the pirated tape of a broadcast on a monitor in the sequestered basement of Civic TV. Renn--who has been searching in vain for something "tough," realistic and unsentimental for his viewers (he turns down Masha's dated bedroom farces and orgy spectacles)--concentrates singlemindedly on discovering the whys and wherefores of "Videodrome"; who produces it, how it originated, and how he can buy into it. Also fascinated with "Videodrome" is Nicki Brand, a pop psychologist and radio personality who becomes Renn's girlfriend when the two meet on a TV talk show concerning sex and violence in the media. Nicki is a masochist; she has Renn pierce her ears with a hatpin while they make love (with "Videodrome" silently playing on the TV) and later burns her breast with a cigarette to convince Renn she is ready to "audition" for "Videodrome."

Assisting Renn in his investigation is "media prophet" Professor Brian O'Blivion, a figure deliberately modelled on the late Marshall McLuhan. O'Blivion, or, rather, O'Blivion's image (since he appears only on videotape) becomes Renn's guiding light as he begins to comprehend the source and purpose of "Videodrome." Renn's investigation becomes seriously complicated when he suffers a series of violent hallucinations while watching all manner of television programming, from the "Videodrome" broadcasts to Professor O'Blivion's tapedepistles. Renn imagines his television console becoming organic, breathing and pulsating and inviting Renn to unite with it in grotesque techno-copulation. Renn also

imagines the handgun he begins wearing for protection growing tentacle-like cables that bore into his forearm, joining with the sinews of his own body. Most unsettling of all is Renn's envisioning a large, vertical, vulva-like opening suddenly bisecting his torso from sternum to navel. (This "stomach pouch," one of the most uncanny and original effects of the fantastic cinema, has central metaphoric significance.)

The resolution occurs when Renn is introduced to Barry Convex, the oily, patronizing Chief of Special Programs for Spectacular Optical, a multinational corporation "specializing in everything from inexpensive eyeglasses for the Third World to missile guidance systems for NATO." When Convex greets Renn over a TV monitor he announces that Spectacular Optical is also the producer of "Videodrome," confirming for Renn his discovery that the program originates in Pittsburgh rather than Malaysia. Convex informs Renn in the storeroom of a Spectacular Optical shop in Toronto that he is aware both of Renn's interest in "Videodrome" and his hallucinations. Convex offers to analyze Renn's visions (with the aid of a futuristic, helmet-like taping device), presumably to restore him to mental health. Instead, Renn makes a startling discovery. Renn's technician Harlan has been working in collusion with Convex, using Renn as a human guinea pig to test the special properties of the "Videodrome" broadcasts. "Videodrome" was never an actual broadcast transmission, but a series of tapes shown to Renn for the specific purpose of learning the effects of the program on behavior. It seems that the "Videodrome" signal is designed to produce a brain tumor behind the retina of the eye; the tumor eventually profoundly distorts perception, making the spectator maleable to those controlling the broadcast signal.

Instead of being diagnosed and treated, Renn is further pro-

grammed by Convex to carry out a series of assassinations, beginning with Renn's two partners, so that Spectacular Optical can buy out Civic TV and turn it into a mass-market video laboratory. Renn is also assigned to kill Bianca O'Blivion, daughter of the Professor and director of the Cathode Ray Mission, a way station for derelicts. Renn has earlier learned that O'Blivion has been dead for some time, his memory and message preserved on tape by his daughter. During a visit to the Cathode Ray Mission, Renn learns from Bianca that her father in fact invented the "Videodrome" transmission signal, believing that the brain tumor and resultant hallucinations would "be the next step in man's evolution as a technological animal." Instead of attempting to implement O'Blivion's utopian plan, Spectacular Optical executives murdered the Professor and appropriated his discovery. Convex programs Renn to kill Bianca because "she knows too much." Instead, Bianca manages to de-program Renn partially and sets him against Convex and Spectacular Optical. Renn discovers Convex at a Spectacular Optical trade show in Toronto and guns him down on stage as Convex announces his company's "Medici Line" of eyeglass wear for the new season. Renn also murders the treasonous Harlan.

Although he has had the satisfaction of a small revenge, Renn's mental deterioration accelerates. A fugitive, he takes refuge on an abandoned freighter where he has his last hallucination, the apparition of Nicki (also killed by Convex) on a surreal television set. Immediately thereafter Renn takes his own life, abruptly ending the film.

Videodrome is an extraordinarily rich, poetically dense film, filled with acerbic wit yet unequivocally pessimistic. While Cronenberg rejects the current presentist sense of apocalypse in contemporary art

(viz., that apocalypse is peculiar to the current age) his mythic dimension refers to the traditional theme of a civilization's downfall. Yet his analysis of contemporary society is non-mystical and incisive; as in Scanners and The Brood, the mythopoeic dimension is sustained simultaneously with critical insight into concrete social questions. In this sense Cronenberg is the most "traditional" of post-modern artists, citing images and ideas from history and an intellectual heritage to provide a framework for his exploration.

From his antonomasiac, Dickensian character names (O'Blivion, Convex) to his social critique, much of Cronenberg's narrative is satiric. While there are instances where he shows sympathy for his subject, Cronenberg finally dismisses society and the ideas that compel it. Unlike any of his previous films, Videodrome lacks a sympathetic figure. Max Renn, the amoral entrepreneur approaching middle age, cannot help but remind us how far the generation of the 1960s has drifted from its social ideals. Renn is both TV executive and symbol of his own audience, a figure locked into alienated, privatized fantasy. Renn has video game joysticks atop his television, and all of his working and non-working hours are involved with the TV image. While appearing the aggressive builder of a new industry, Renn is in reality a pathetic invert. The limited nature of his personal vision is reflected in the sleazy, decrepit aspect of his surroundings at Civic TV. Videodrome is decidedly not a film that lauds technology and shows its development coextensive with intellectual progress. There is no stainless-steel-and-glass efficiency at Civic TV, only the sense of cramped hustle and bustle in hurriedly renovated facilities, the effect of entrepreneurial capitalism trying to make it in another self-defeating cycle of competition.

Cronenberg's cynicism is especially reflected in the character of Nicki, Renn's psychologist girlfriend. Far from representing the availability of psychoanalysis to the general public, Nicki, more than Raglan in The Brood, demonstrates the sham of pop psychology. Her radio program "Emotional Rescue" (after a Rolling Stones album) is an advertising medium and a platform for Nicki's transformation into a media celebrity. Her masochism is reflective of her utter absorption in sexuality, resulting in her inurement to experience. Like Renn she is a passive figure masquerading as a manipulator.

A good deal of the film's satire, and much of its intellectual content, center on Professor Brian O'Blivion; Cronenberg uses a McLuhan figure in order to examine the 1980s consequences of 1960s utopianism, and to speculate on the extent to which McLuhan served (or was co-opted by) the power structure. There are several ways in which the character is important. O'Blivion states (when first introduced on a TV monitor) that "life on TV is more real than life in the flesh." We never see O'Blivion (he calls this his "TV name") "in the flesh" since he was killed by Spectacular Optical two years before the narrative begins, yet he becomes a powerful presence for Max Renn and a television audience. The popular conceit that television bestows immortality is taken here quite literally; TV is shown as a repository for the soul, a technological equivalent of heaven. Cronenberg begins through O'Blivion an examination of media as an "extension of man" (McLuhan's famous phrase).

The spiritual dimension of O'Blivion/McLuhan is further represented in the Cathode Ray Mission, the hobo hostel run by O'Blivion's orphaned and pious daughter. Derelicts are given free meals in cubicles equipped with TV sets; they pass the time watching game shows and soap

operas. Max Renn smirks at the Mission's program, wondering "how a few doses of TV can help these people." Bianca explains that the Mission will help "patch them into the world's mixing board," in other words, give them the language to participate in the media-oriented global village. O'Blivion's office, carefully preserved by his daughter, underscores him as a prophet and seer. Supposedly modelled on McLuhan's home (McLuhan was a convert to Catholicism) but more closely resembling Freud's Berggasse 19 office, O'Blivion's quarters are festooned with images of Moses, Christ, and iconography from various stages of civilization's evolution. O'Blivion sees the earlier saints and prophets as mediators; like those figures, he is a lawgiver, synthesizing older language forms to create a new vision.

But the O'Blivion religiosity is counterposed by its dangerous naivete. O'Blivion announces on tape that "the battle for the mind of North America will take place in the video arena...the Videodrome." "Videodrome" is in every respect O'Blivion's creation. His belief that the cancer caused by the transmission signal--a play on the concept that TV physically transforms you--is a natural evolution of the brain suggests his inability to give the "extensions of man" thesis any moral qualification. The problem is most crucial to Renn's hallucinations, since his developing psychosis could hardly be termed "natural" given Renn's disruptive function in the community and his personal alienation.

The idea of O'Blivion's murder by the power structure also figures in Cronenberg's exploration of McLuhan's thinking. The Professor dies on an operating table (at the hands of surgeons employed by a corporation) while trying to have his "natural" growth removed. O'Blivion, like Dr. Ruth in Scanners, is an essentially humane but misguided intellectual,

maleable because he lacks a solid political center. O'Blivion is to be criticized for providing the media theories commandeered by power, and Ruth, another behavioral scientist, is to be blamed for the work that ushered in the drug culture and the era of mind control. When Masha discovers the origin of "Videodrome" she tries to steer Renn away, telling him that it is "political" and that "it has what you don't have....a philosophy." We might assume that the philosophy behind "Videodrome" is O'Blivion's, but it becomes clear that the Professor is as shallow in his thinking as the absolutely valueless Max Renn. The essential point is the need for a philosophy to fill the void created by the pragmatism of the technological age. Renn looks to O'Blivion for this philosophy, if only to provide a rationale for his morbid fixation on the video image and his need to exploit it in the interests of profit, but the philosophy becomes an extension of the very delusion of media.

Pathos occurs in O'Blivion's persecution, and particularly in the captivity of Bianca and the Cathode Ray Mission by Convex and his associates. Bianca is haughty but vulnerable, the saintly keeper of the hearth. She is at first wary of Max Renn, who snidely remarks "I love the view" when he sees how O'Blivion's richly-appointed office overlooks the parade of the destitute entering and leaving the Cathode Ray Mission. He assumes that O'Blivion and his daughter are cynical opportunists like himself, gulling people with their cultism. But Renn comes to recognize Bianca's innocence. The Cathode Ray Mission was a tragic but not inhumane experiment. Like Cameron Vale, Darryl Revok, and the Scanner underground, the O'Blivions and the Cathode Ray Mission represent a positive spiritual force misdirected and overtaken by the "secular" world. Such a metaphor is made stronger when Renn assassinates Convex at the

trade show. Convex is busy announcing his "Medici Line," using Michaelangelo's Creation of Adam as a gaudy stage backdrop, and quotes from Lorenzo deMedici ("Love comes in at the eye"; "The eye is the window of the soul") as part of his ad campaign. Convex is an updated symbol of Empire and its ability to absorb elements of human progress towards its own ends.

Still, Cronenberg shows ambivalence toward O'Blivion, his daughter, and their Mission, just as he showed toward the visionary Scanners. There is a fanatical streak in the Professor and Bianca, and their peculiar religiosity about the media image always points to their distance from social reality, undercutting their humane commitment. Part of this is demonstrated when Bianca de-programs (or "converts") Renn when he is ordered by Convex to commit murder. At this stage Renn's "Videodrome"-produced hallucinations are severe; he is totally unable to distinguish his horrific visions from reality. Bianca in effect "baptizes" him by showing him how to become "the new flesh" (a very Burroughsian concept), that is, to acquiesce to his visions and physically merge with his technological nightmare. She temporarily releases him from his agony by showing him how to force the enemy to share his hallucination; Renn surrenders his consciousness totally to the reality he perceives. She paraphrases the New Testament by telling Renn he is "the video word made flesh." In other words, the TV image is the Logos now incarnate in Max Renn, the perverse Messiah or New Man, who is to represent the commonality of the video hallucination. Renn envisions a TV picture tube becoming fleshy and elastic, extending outward, producing a biomechanical arm with a gun similar to his own. The static on the tube turns into human veins and arteries; the gun (a literal "electron gun") showers Renn with a chemical annointment. The wounds

that should be visible on Renn's torso appear instead on the face of the television set, now a thorax resembling Renn's own. The mood of this particular scene is very solemn. It is an attempt to transpose the myth of sacrificial displacement to the modern context, but at the same time to send up this myth as implausible in the current setting. Bianca has Renn recite the words "Death to Videodrome, long live the new flesh," as he raises his hand in a clenched-fist fascist salute.

More than any previous Cronenberg film, the mood of Videodrome, set in part by Howard Shore's eerie score (combining electronic cacaphony, sounds of heartbeat and respiration together with dolorous liturgical themes), is that of a requiem. A requiem for society perhaps, but certainly for the media. While Cronenberg has professed an interest in McLuhan's theories, it is difficult to ignore the criticism he offers of the media and the soft-headed utopianism of his McLuhan figure. The film is especially deft in satirizing the one-way nature of the media, their inability to foster genuine communication, and their tendency to turn the spectator into consumer and voyeur. (An important sequence is when Bianca tells Max Renn that her father communicates only through videotape, since "the monologue is the preferred mode of discourse.") Renn's appearance with Nicki on "The Rena King Show" is a telling example. Bianca later tells Renn that he "said some very superficial things" on the program. The TV talk show is by its nature superficial; it is willing to deal in controversy (Phil Donahue) and to involve the spectator ("talk back" news programs) only insofar as its advocacy of dominant ideology and the consumer marketplace is not disrupted. Nicki Brand's call-in radio show is less than superficial as it sustains the illusion of audience involvement.

The greatest representations of the dilemma posed by the media

environment are Max Renn's hallucinations. Renn's organic TV, with the bulging picture tube into which he inserts his head, is the best realization thus far of the "glass teat." Further, the incarnation of the image into flesh represents the fundamental goal of a fixation on the image (as in the consumption of erotica), i.e., the ability to make the fantasy substantial, to achieve physical communion with the inanimate.

The concept of the new technology being an "extension of man" is viewed as risible. The organic pistol that bores into Renn's hand (a Walther PPK--the gun James Bond refers to as an "extension of [his] right arm") becomes an ulcerated cyst, not a new, useful appendage. The crucial hallucination is Renn's stomach fissure, which first appears as a rash as he sits distractedly watching television. That this hallucination should first appear as a "symptom" is significant; it points to hypochondria as a by-product of narcissism and inversion. The gruesome "stomach vagina" is a key representation of Cronenberg's interest in the links between mind and body, the physical and the metaphysical. The wound that erupts on Renn, like the cancers on the Psychoplasms patients in The Brood, has its origin in mental disturbance--in this Cronenberg seems solidly Freudian. Renn is idly watching TV, trying to absorb Professor O'Blivion's lecture, when he absentmindedly scratches the rash on his stomach with the muzzle of the Walther PPK; he stares down to discover with shock and amazement the widening hole in his abdomen. He slowly prods the opening with the gun, teeth gritted in agony. His arm gradually dissolves into his abdomen up to the elbow.

At the end of Carlos Fuentes' epic novel Terra Nostra an androgynous is born with penis and vagina, impregnating itself and ending the dialectic of sex. Videodrome contains in the image of Max Renn a

terrible variation on androgyny. Both the penis (Walther PPK) and vagina (the stomach ulcer) are caricatured renderings of a sexuality perpetrated by the media and dominant culture, internalized by the passive and image-consuming Renn. The union of penis and vagina occurring when Renn investigates his own body is an attempt to assert sentience and "self-awareness" where human nature is extinct; it is also an image of self-torture and suicide. Renn's wound is a particular form of castration. As a purveyor of images he maintains the authority of the gaze. By selling images he pretends to transmit to his audience the illusion of power the gaze represents. But the "stomach vagina" reverses Renn's position. He is at first at odds with himself, then the outside world. He is defeated by the inversion he sells which is an "extension" of the self.

Cronenberg uses the stomach vagina to make a major shift in narrative approach. Up to a point it is clear that Renn's hallucinations are his own. Suddenly, however, it is not clear the degree to which other characters actually participate in Renn's fantasies. Both Barry Convex and Harlan assume that Renn's stomach fissure exists; they program him to carry out assassinations by shoving videotape cassettes directly into his body. Cronenberg substitutes a more subtle and realistic image of mind-control with this totally fantastic one. By so doing Cronenberg creates a metaphor not of the more extreme versions of behavioral modification concocted by the CIA, but of the power structure's ability to shove down the throats of the public endless diversions and satisfactions. Renn's "programming" consists of the same plastic substance he sells every day as a commodity, and which he uses ceaselessly to fill up his leisure time. Convex's rape of Max Renn is the rape of the spectator by media/corporate culture; the sender-receiver relationship taken for granted by the consumer

is suddenly made literal. As in sadomasochism, however, the roles can be reversed since both parties accede to one image of power and desire. Since Harlan and Convex are conscious of the power of the fantasy world they create, they are equally vulnerable to destruction. Max is thus able to turn the tables when his stomach wound becomes a "vagina dentata," chewing Harlan's hand into a ticking hand grenade. The media's psychological rape can be reversed, the fantasy projected backward to absorb and terrorize those who create it.

Whether or not Harlan is actually killed by the exploding "grenade" or Convex shot by Renn's organic gun-hand is unimportant. Cronenberg wants us to contemplate the collective participation in the media apparition and its ability to transform reality. Convex's body explodes on the convention floor, sprouting a crop of tumors, simply because he is a dispenser of cancers, and he is recognized as such by Renn and by Cronenberg's audience. Convex, who could easily emcee "The Dating Game" or "The Price is Right," is an image of disease metastasizing behind a slick veneer. Convex is always affable, courteous in an uncommitted, transparently artificial way (he tells his conventioners as he walks onstage, "You know me...and I sure know you...each and every one of you!"). This film, like Scanners, insists on the benign face of evil in liberal, corporate democracy.

The ambivalence of Cronenberg's thinking helps frame the mournful, pessimistic conclusion. Renn's suicide, with his lips slowly enunciating "Long live the new flesh" as he raises the gun to his head, suggests that he now has the philosophy warned against by Masha. Renn has ceased being the hustler as he is awakened to a spiritual dimension by the power of the image. But the fact that the image remains a delusion never

reaches him; his hunger for transcendence is not distinguished from his search for something "tough" to titillate him. The spiritual search is never separated from the compulsion to immerse in activity that contradicts true self-awareness and introspection. Renn's descent is characterized by a pattern of flight, evident in his everyday activity of moving nervously from one involvement to another. Convex asks Renn: "Why would anybody watch a scum show like 'Videodrome'...why did you watch it Max?" Renn answers, "Business reasons." The issue becomes whether Renn reaches his false "transcendence" out of a capacity in his own nature (a capacity suggested as perverse), a need to investigate, or simple greed. Renn's apotheosis is tragic and pathetic. A broken charcoal burner on the freighter erupts into flame as Renn kneels ceremoniously before the electronic fire of his own video hallucination. Even the ritual of Renn's psychotic hara-kiri dissolves in the media image. Renn first hallucinates the action of his suicide before carrying it out; in other words, death itself is rehearsed, orchestrated so as to fit the dramatic expectations fostered by media.

Cronenberg debunks not just the purveyors of media culture but the spectator. Convex's trade show, with its citations of Renaissance art, refers to the concept of spectator centrality that influences film theory. The sense of primacy that traditional spectator centrality is supposed to lend is made into a sick joke by Convex and his henchmen. Although Convex's manipulation of Max Renn is deliberately fantastic, the real issue is the power of the media to cajole the spectator into believing that critical faculties are respected by media, that the spectator indeed controls the media image, and that, most important, the image represents reality. Cronenberg's bleakest point is that beauty no longer comes in at

the eye; what comes in is obsession and incurable disease.

The tortured subjectivity into which Max Renn dissolves is Cronenberg's new vision of apocalypse. The transcendence and revelation that Renn seeks does not become manifest for the audience: the screen turns black as Renn kills himself. There is no revelation associated with this apocalypse both out of Cronenberg's basic skepticism of transcendence and his much more critical view of the transcendence offered by culture. The pessimism with which Cronenberg views the subjectivity of the media environment might be extended to include art itself in the age of mechanical reproduction, to use Walter Benjamin's term. While Cronenberg is certainly not the traditional apocalypticist of American letters, the anxiety that fills his work regarding the impossibility of a spiritual search in the modern landscape continues to give his sensibility a place in this tradition.

CHAPTER III
APOCALYPSE INSIDE: THE DUALITY OF
THE DEMONIC POSSESSION FILM

Where there are no gods, demons
will hold sway
-- Novalis

The last loosing of Satan and the image of the devil as figure for evil are central, of course, to Biblical apocalypse, the apocalyptic literary tradition, and the horror film. The modern horror film has continued a portrayal of evil as an objective entity, a perception which, in Judeo-Christian civilization, has been consistently linked to changing notions of what constitutes individual and societal health and stability. In his pivotal study of Romanticism's impact on the literary imagination, M.H. Abrams notes

...the tendency, grounded in texts of the New Testament itself, to internalize apocalypse by transferring the theater of events from the outer earth and heaven to the spirit of the single believer, in which there enacts itself, metaphorically, the entire eschatological drama of the destruction of the old creation, the union with Christ, and the emergence of a new creation--not in illud tempus, but here and now, in this life.¹

Abrams' discussion here pertains to what has been developed earlier about apocalypse as a form of projection based on a contractual relationship with God internalized by the individual and the collectivity. The American civilizing experience, for example, is described in folklore and literature as a divinely-ordained contract which, when violated

¹M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 47.

through any sort of failure, would bring about a sense of the immanence of apocalypse and necessitate victims on whom failure (in the form of the violence of the community) could be displaced. This victim frequently has the function of demon; the confrontation with the demon usually has several aspects.² Folklore has described society's attempts to pretend that evil is an external force visited on the community, or, in the Calvinist tradition, a disease brought about by the individual's falling-out with God. In most instances, Protestant theology tends to see a demon lurking inside every human error, and psychoanalysis is disavowed as a means of showing any links among sin, mental imbalance, and societal illness. The changing attitude toward what constitutes evil and the identification of "demons" becomes central to an appreciation of another phase of the apocalyptic temperament, one which finds probably its fullest realization in the horror film. The internal/external configuration of the demonic has some relevance to the films previously discussed (e.g., The Hills Have Eyes, Scanners) in their questioning of the supernatural element in horror and its ability to tell the spectator that evil is removed from human reality. The legacy of Psycho has informed us in the blunt manner peculiar to cinema that evil can no longer be confined to the supernatural. It is not surprising that at this date audiences look rather askance at demonic/supernatural elements in fantastic cinema, and prefer the horrific to represent disaster located in the pathological. Yet the new critical, secular approach to evil retains its ties to the supernatural; amidst the devastation he sees Cronenberg conceives of transcendence.

²The notion of gaining power from the destruction of the demon recurs in American folklore. See Richard Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 18 passim.

On a broader cultural scale, the criticism of evil in genre cinema remains apocalyptic since it does not provide a genuine criticism, an alternative after the current order collapses. Our concern here is with the specific shapes of that illusion and how the concept of the demon feeds into the horror genre and reinforces apocalyptic vision.

To identify an individual as a "demon" is to ascribe to that subject a supernatural force. Anthropology reminds us that the very notion of being "obsessed" or "possessed" signifies a power that places the individual in a privileged position in the community, as in the simple example of the sick or insane person shunted off to a place away from the general population, or in some instances patronized and treated as a saint or visionary. The complex allegorical function of the demonic agent can be seen in a character such as Heathcliff (or Ahab), whose "evil" compulsion is also involved in the general vitality of the situation surrounding and depending on him.³ Although the "demonic" or "possessed" character is portrayed in literary tradition as being limited by the circumstances of control by a singular force, the supernatural quality of the possession makes that character very dynamic and central to the narrative by connecting others to the realm of the spiritual. The line between angel and devil is always very thin. The issue here is that the acknowledgment of devils always has the purpose of maintaining a mythic apparatus drawing society together, constituting a contract that is metaphysical, thereby allowing evil to be removed to another dimension in order to permit the maintenance of society without significant change. The appearance of the demon/victim also has the purpose of revitalizing society through confrontation, since

³The demonic agent is discussed in Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), pp. 25-70.

exorcism becomes a ritual of the community, and since there is a belief that the destruction of the demon will transform its spiritual force from negative to positive and allow it to have a beneficial impact on the community. The best example here is the view of the supernatural power of the American Indian depicted in literature, and the ways by which the frontiersman aspired to this power, first by destroying the Indian, then by pretending to absorb his power by absorbing aspects of his culture.⁴ The Indian should be seen as a representative instance of the demon/villain construct to be viewed against the larger conception of evil in American art.

American literature has long been engaged in a process of unmasking the supernatural as a mechanism by which the individual and the collectivity are "duped" into believing that evil is an external force rather than the manifestation of specific pathological situations which eventually impact on the community; a good example of this unmasking and interpretation of evil is Melville's The Confidence-Man, where evil is shown to take control by its power to dupe. Melville's satirical, black allegory suggests that the capacities to con and be conned are basic to national character. The alternative analysis of evil refers to a dialogue which has persisted in theology itself, one that is very distant from the Puritan movement and the Protestant ethic that have affected the mainstream of American art. Abrams refers to St. Augustine's Confessions as an interior dialogue constituting

"two wills" locked in internecine conflict--Armageddon translated into psychomachia--and of a savage, persistent, and self-destructive suffering which culminates in the abrupt interposition of God to effect, at a specific point in time, a new identity, described

⁴See Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence, pp. 146-179.

metaphorically as the end of the old creature and the beginning of the new....⁵

This represents the apocalyptic world-view interiorized, suggesting the tendency to make the crisis of the individual life coextensive with dramatic transitions in history, but it also provides the evidence to be addressed by thinkers (such as Teilhard de Chardin) who looked for the psychological foundations of evil. Most crucial is Augustine's attempt to turn the mind back on itself (in the manner of Plato) in the belief that self-discovery provides an understanding of good and evil consistent with the traditional Christian belief in discovering God through human interaction.

The controlling attitude of Puritan thought, with its belief in a personal contract with the divinity rather than a pursuit of the spiritual through interaction within the collectivity, has continued to emphasize the devil as an exterior force outside the control of the individual, appearing arbitrarily to suggest failure in a relationship with God that is unstable because of its vertical and very deterministic nature. The devil can then signify the remote nature of crisis, and the expulsion of the devil signifies the ability of the community to recoup itself by going through a sacrificial ritual that in fact treats a symptom of collective illness by seeing evil as specifically localized.

The alternative tendency within religious tradition to view mental illness as symptomatic of demonic possession was probably correct insofar as it apprehended an important insight of the Gospels and the early church doctors regarding the links between sin and aberrant behavior, but incorrect in the belief that punishment was required to drive out an evil

⁵Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 48.

to which the subject acquiesced. Dante did much to cultivate the notion of "the hell that man creates" and introduces, however modestly, a view of the unconscious mind by depicting the Inferno as a set of circles suggesting repetition, or the unconsciously self-destructive behavior in which the individual remains immersed rather than face some purgative memory. Dante's work also demonstrates the transpsychical nature of evil by showing chaos born out of individual, idiosyncratic concerns that are ultimately irrational, self-destructive, and against the need of the collectivity.⁶

The key point here is how the various interpretations of the devil affect depictions of the nature of evil in art. The existence of Satan as an objective entity is not as important an element for consideration as the way that art (in this case the modern horror film) chooses to use the devil as allegory for society's inability to recover itself.

In the preceding chapter apocalypse in the horror film was discussed in terms of the breakdown in collective belief and the resulting "sacrificial crisis" that occurs when myth no longer has any efficacy. While that chapter concentrated on films depicting a pervasive insanity caused by the general failure of the American civilizing experience, and the inability even of science to fill the vacuum created by the failure of myth and religion, our concern here is with the specific understanding of the nature of evil current in the horror film and how the perception of particular notions of evil signifies the stability or disintegration of society.

⁶Modern interpretations of Dante developing this line of thought are Wallace Fowlie, A Reading of Dante's "Inferno" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Erich Auerbach, Dante: Poet of the Secular World, trans. Ralph Manheim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

All of the several films discussed here--from Rosemary's Baby (which helped initiate the demonic possession cycle) to the more recent Fear No Evil--tie the appearance of the devil to the onset of apocalypse and the somehow predestined failure of society. This is as true for films that take a cynical view of organized religion and use the devil for allegorical purposes (Rosemary's Baby) as for those that ostensibly project a need for "spiritual values" and the recovery of traditional beliefs (The Exorcist).

The peculiarity of the demonic possession film of the 1970s and '80s (aside from its abundant examples⁷) is its interest in psychologizing or politicizing evil as evidence of disruption in the community while simultaneously refusing this secularized interpretation by showing the devil as a living, breathing monster with many iconographic ties to the Satan of tradition. The very recent Fear No Evil, for example, is an almost literal (although quirky) retelling of the expulsion of Lucifer and the Revelation of St. John while at the same time being a fable about social disintegration rooted in some very tangible concerns. Of importance in analyses of demonic possession films is attention to their affirmation or denial of religious/deterministic views of history and their attempts to keep religion and ideology distinct.

⁷The compiling of a complete list of demonic possession films of the 1970s would be a demanding project. A separate monograph on this film might attempt an analysis of the causative factors behind the rapid growth of the sub-genre and its importance to the modern horror film. A few of the more popular titles (aside from the very pivotal films discussed in this dissertation) are Abby, Ruby, Beyond the Door, Beyond the Door II, Exorcist II: The Heretic, The Long Night of Exorcism, The Sexorcists, Kung Fu Exorcists, The Touch of Satan, Beyond Evil, The Sentinel, The Manitou, Beyond the Darkness, Love Exorcist, House of Exorcism, The Devil's Nightmare, Exorcism's Daughter, The Devil's Rain, and at least a score of others. Obviously many of these are exploitation films appearing in the wake of The Exorcist, often attempting to combine (very awkwardly) a number of popular genres, including pornography.

Jacques Tourneur's Night of the Demon (1957) is somewhat of a breakthrough work in its use of the devil to convey psychological horror. This statement must be qualified, of course, since a similar assertion could be made about Ulmer's The Black Cat, and much controversy has arisen about how the appearance of an actual devil in Night of the Demon (known in the U.S. as Curse of the Demon) deflates its psychological themes. Nevertheless, many aspects of this film are relevant to the demonic possession cycle and the atmosphere of apocalypse that sub-genre conveys. In Tourneur's film the Niall MacGinnis character, one of many incarnations of Aleister Crowley in the English Gothic cinema,⁸ represents evil as the absence of rationality and the dangers of the power of suggestion over a mind lacking any real center of gravity. The Dana Andrews character has the traditional function of shaman in his ability to localize and "name" the cause of evil. Although the Andrews character cannot "drive out" the evil, he can make himself immune to it by asserting the primacy of the rational, empirical mind over hysteria. The MacGinnis character is hoisted by his own petard through his fixation on obsessional beliefs. The film can therefore conclude that (a) all people have the capacity to immunize themselves against superstition, or (b) only a certain sector of society (the decadent upper middle class or aristocracy) is given to such beliefs in the first place, or (c) society can always congregate around the ritual of a shaman/hero who has already been inoculated with the disease of superstition and can therefore name and expel it. As we shall see, the current demonic possession film responds to all three contentions in largely negative ways, for the purpose of showing that evil, while

⁸This point is brought out in William K. Everson, Classics of the Horror Film (New York: Citadel Press, 1974), p. 183.

it can indeed be compared with pathologies, cannot be so easily localized, and beliefs in rituals of society as well as the realization of these beliefs in narrative are open to considerable question.

II

Roman Polanski's Rosemary's Baby (1968) is a significantly "loaded" film both in its centrality to its sub-genre (a position similar to Psycho's relation to psychological horror overall) and aspects one can see in hindsight concerning its historical significance and the circumstances of its production. Robin Wood has noted that this film appeared at a time when other genres, including the Western (The Wild Bunch) were going into an apocalyptic phase.⁹ Perhaps the real point here is that Rosemary's Baby, as an apocalyptic work, seems inevitably tied to 1968, an apocalyptic year. The Tet offensive, the murders of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and increased domestic strife marked for many the beginning of a new pessimism and a down-turn of the American self-image. At one level, Rosemary's Baby must be viewed as an embodiment of the turmoil of that period, perhaps precisely because its political discourse is so muddled and inadequately informed. The circumstances of Polanski's personal life, including the tragic murder of his wife Sharon Tate at the hands of the "demonic" Manson family, also add a reflexive, metapolitical coloration to the film, particularly as popular accounts of that episode in many instances suggested that the "demonism" that victimized Ms. Tate was the consequence of the hysteria and breakdown of collective belief that the demonic possession

⁹Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in Andrew Britton, et al., The American Nightmare (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), p. 17.

film attempts to address.¹⁰ Also important is the location of the film, made rather explicit in Ira Levin's novel--the Dakota apartment building in New York (referred to as the Bramford). Long known as a celebrity hideaway, the Dakota's own exotic mythos and neo-Gothic ambience has been transformed with the death of John Lennon on its doorstep, a transformation involving not only a reminder of the increasingly bleak and reactionary period in which that murder occurred, but of the dismal failure and narcissistic withdrawal of the counterculture spirit of the 1960s. I mention this since as one watches the opening and concluding overhead shots of the Dakota in Rosemary's Baby one is conscious of the film's genuinely prophetic as well as apocalyptic qualities: it is a work about sclerosis and ideals scrapped or compromised in the most mercenary and venal ways.

While Rosemary's Baby seems primarily a parody of the incarnation of Christ and also the Faust myth (Guy Woodhouse sells his soul for careerism), its tone is set early by a dependence on folklore and nineteenth-century fiction. When Rosemary and Guy confer with Rosemary's friend Hutch we learn of the evil history of the Bramford apartment building, and Hutch's narrative ties the Bramford to the image of the Terrible House¹¹ used by Hawthorne and Poe to represent the sins of past history bearing down on the present, to make even inanimate structures tainted and doomed.

¹⁰At least several works dealing with the Charles Manson killings have tried to interrelate the murders with Rosemary's Baby, the general output of Roman Polanski, the occult in Southern California, and the movie industry overall. The most sensational example is probably Ed Sanders, The Family (New York: Avon Books, 1972).

¹¹The concept of the Terrible House recurs in some form or other in various studies of American literature; the first application of the term to the horror film is, to my knowledge, in Britton, et al., The American Nightmare.

The sense of foreboding that this exposition develops makes us conscious of the world Guy and Rosemary are about to enter, but it more specifically establishes the "evil age" similar to the "Saturn in retrograde" theme¹² of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. The spirit of the "evil age" of Rosemary's Baby is close in feeling to Hooper's work, although more explicit in Ira Levin's novel than in the film itself.

Hutch's cautionary recounting of the Bramford's evil history refers to Gothic fiction and accounts of notorious crimes in American history associated with particular landmarks, such as the infamous Old Brewery in New York.¹³ In this instance Rosemary's Baby, like Psycho and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, "steps outside" of its text and its own sub-genre to make some specific connections to events in history and, later in the film, concerns of contemporary society. Hutch warns Guy and Rosemary that the Bramford is where the cannibalistic Trench Sisters performed bizarre rituals, where "an infant baby was found wrapped in a newspaper," and where the devil-worshipping Adrian Marcato was murdered by an angry mob. Except for Marcato, who later figures prominently in the film, there is no explanation for the other evil acts or why they should affect Guy and Rosemary.

¹²In his "Introduction to the American Horror Film," Robin Wood seems to acknowledge Rosemary's Baby as a forerunner of the "evil age" horror film.

¹³The Old Brewery was a notorious tenement building erected at the Five Points section of New York's Lower East Side in 1792. Between that date and the Old Brewery's demolition in 1852 the building gained a reputation for the seemingly endless unspeakable crimes committed within its walls, many of which may be apocryphal. Regardless of the origin of the stories concerning these crimes, the fact of the Old Brewery's existence seems to have given a permanent evil "aura" to the Five Points district. The genesis of the New York Mafia is heavily associated with the Five Points Gang of Johnny Torrio. An archetypal Terrible House, the Old Brewery demonstrates folklore's transmutation into projection and wish-fulfillment. See Jay Robert Nash, Bloodletters and Badmen: A Narrative Encyclopedia of American Criminals from the Pilgrims to the Present (New York: M. Evans & Co., 1973), pp. 428-29. See also William F. Barnard, Forty Years at the Five Points (New York: Doubleday, 1923).

The power to perceive evil seems the real subject of Polanski's dark satire rather than demonism per se. The film makes more explicit the novel's allegorical contention that evil exists when good has somehow disappeared or when its supporting institutions have become hollow or bear contradictory impulses--when there is, in semiological terms, a discrepancy between signifier and signified. In this sense one can see how Rosemary's Baby creates an "evil age" signifying an erosion of structures, a time determined in Eastern thought as one when

. . . property alone confers social rank; wealth becomes the only motive of all the virtues, passion and lust the only bonds between the married, falsehood and deception the first condition of success in life, sexuality the sole means of enjoyment, while external, merely ritualistic religion is confused with spirituality.¹⁴

In short, the Hindu belief in kali yuga compares well with the state of upper middle-class liberal society that is the locale of this film. We can go back to the concept of the kali yuga at various points to explain the specific apocalypse Rosemary's Baby describes, but it is important first to understand how the film shows this crisis developing in the mind of the individual. The film has frequently been discussed in terms of how it represents the often well-grounded fears of a young woman manipulated by patriarchy and particularly the conspiratorial and fraternalistic medical establishment.¹⁵ But this view fails to take fully into account the specific use of evil and demonism as allegorical elements, nor does it pay sufficient attention to the origins and nature of Rosemary's guilt and fear. While Rosemary's fears can be seen as projections about patriarchal control, she

¹⁴Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1952), p. 64.

¹⁵The most recent example is Barbara Leaming, Polanski: The Filmmaker as Voyeur (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), pp. 82-90.

is often complicit in the nature of the crisis the film describes. She more than Guy is attracted to the Bramford's old-world charm; it seems no accident that she decides to get a Vidal Sassoon haircut (which even Guy sees as hideous) shortly after she conceives the anti-Christ. Rosemary's metamorphosis into an androgyny is another image of the sexual revolution as a move to solipsism, inversion, narcissism, and vulnerability.

Most interesting in the film's depiction of apocalypse developing in the microcosm of the individual soul are Rosemary's dream sequences. The first dream occurs shortly after the suicide of Rosemary's new-found friend Theresa, and the Woodhouses' first meeting with Theresa's guardians, Roman and Minnie Castavet. As Rosemary drifts into sleep she envisions a scene from her Catholic girlhood when, as a student in a parochial grammar school, she was harshly berated by an outraged nun who thrashed her for ruining the school's chances at "beautiful school competition." In the dream sequence a child's point-of-view is established by focusing the camera at an up-angle at the hysterical nun, who scampers nervously back and forth while a team of masons bricks up a series of windows behind her. The job was apparently necessitated by Rosemary's revealing the school's illegitimate plans to beautify itself. In actuality the words coming from the nun emanate from Minnie Castavet in the nextdoor apartment; the sequence represents Polanski's deft understanding of dream processes and how the dream is activated by or able to coincide with events in conscious life. It so happens that the dialogue used by Minnie to castigate her husband for Theresa's suicide (causing the Castavets to look for a new protégé to carry out their plans for Satan's incarnation) works well within Rosemary's memory of childhood trauma, which has apparently remained deeply engrained and becomes one of the elements to make her answer

"I don't know" when Roman asks if she is religious.

Interpretations of this sequence are difficult and necessarily reveal the complexity of the crisis enveloping the world of the film. The language and tone of Minnie and the nun in Rosemary's memory are made identical and equally irritating ("I told you not to tell her anything in advance... I told you she wouldn't be open-minded"). The sequence develops the sense of horror emanating from an overbearing harridan who has control of someone impressionable and defenseless (Theresa and the child Rosemary were in similar predicaments). Both Minnie and the nun are witches in that their power to manipulate is based not on any shared religious belief but on the sheer force of intimidation. The nun's hysteria--triggered by the school's inability to participate in a secular activity--is shown as a reason for Rosemary's departure from the church, a departure leaving her powerless in mature life to face the forces of evil that have in fact been developing within her, namely, guilt and repression.

A sense of contradiction is deliberately developed here. One ambition is to show the innate contradictions of bourgeois institutions. The linkage of Minnie and the nun, particularly if we view Minnie as a manifestation of Rosemary's earlier anxieties, is most revealing. We can then understand that Minnie's position of authority and her ability to terrorize are based entirely on her credibility, on the fact that she is not wholly evil. Minnie's methods of controlling people are thus very pedestrian; her truly evil side is seen only when she is within the closed society of the coven, just as the nun's irrational cruelty is unleashed when she is protected by the authority of her habit and the classroom. Minnie could easily be an upper middle-class yenta feeding her children chicken soup; the witches' coven, like the Ku Klux Klan, is not the aberrant splinter faction that

bourgeois society would like to explain away, but a logical manifestation of long-abiding symptoms signifying a profound malady.

Rosemary's first dream does not signify so much her rejection of the church as her inability to recognize the contradictions that transform her life. This inability plus her tendency to accept guilt continually place her in the role of victim. Rosemary's neurosis allows contradictions to exist that increase the spiritual void she seems to feel is external.

The notion of the church being spiritually bankrupt is underlined by Rosemary's viewing on TV of Pope Paul VI's visit to New York. Roman Castavet emphasizes, for obvious and hypocritical reasons, the Pope's ornate vestments and the immense wealth in the hands of the church. More important is the contexting of the Pope's visit by the media image. The TV is almost constantly on in the Woodhouses' apartment, and we are reminded of the media's ability to abstract, co-opt, or dissolve previously potent cultural beliefs. Before seeing the Pope on TV Rosemary watches a Yamaha commercial starring Guy; the ad is a miniature Faust comedy/drama, with Guy instantly responding "OK" to a salesman's pitch to "join the swingin' world of Yamaha." Acquisition and the drive for success are suggested as reasons behind the Woodhouses' downfall just as they are motivating forces behind both the devil-worshippers and the church. As much of the film develops from Rosemary's perspective, a central issue becomes her quandry over whether or not to acquiesce to the dream of success which is her husband's sole preoccupation. While Rosemary shows tenderness and an introspective capability she is also caught up in acquiring all the accoutrements of upper middle-class life, best exemplified by the decor of her apartment, which becomes increasingly chic as she slides deeper into terror and insanity at the hands of the Satanists. There

is strong justification to suggest that the anti-Christ she bears is the culmination of this affluence and complacency, which have revealed the vacuum composing her life.

At the same time the two witches, Minnie and Roman, try to keep Rosemary fixated entirely on this level of existence. Minnie berates Roman for spilling an exotic cocktail (the color of blood) on her expensive rug during the Woodhouses' visit; Minnie talks openly and brashly about money, as when she asks Rosemary the prices of furniture, or when she warns Dr. Sapirstein "not to charge any fancy society prices" when he treats Rosemary. The attempt to keep Rosemary fixated on money and consumer goods is very well developed in the metaphoric images of the chocolate mousse dessert Minnie sends over and the vegetable drink and special cakes Minnie prepares for Rosemary. All of these are attempts to drug Rosemary, to keep her drugged, and to nurture her demonic embryo. Rosemary hesitates at various points (her refusal to eat the mousse) but for the most part goes along to please Guy, to be accepted, and to enter the right social circle. She becomes Dr. Sapirstein's patient solely because Minnie reminds her that Sapirstein treats high society; Guy remarks that Sapirstein once appeared on a TV show called "Open End," a fact Rosemary regularly repeats to her friends, thinking that television validates her decisions and gives an imprimatur to Sapirstein.

Rosemary is quick to remind people of her dreams of upward mobility; she tells everyone that "Guy has done Luther and Nobody Loves an Albatross and a lot of commercials." For Guy and Rosemary works of art blend together with commercial advertising; they are all products, means to an end in the dream of success. The references to Osborne's play, with the implied backdrop of Martin Luther's life, are especially

interesting. Luther's struggle against Rome was eventually involved in self-discovery and larger moral and theological questions affecting his congregation. Guy's rebellion against traditional religion is totally blind and motivated solely by self-interest. The references to the play are interesting also when considering Osborne's use of Eriksonian readings of Luther's career; but while psychological motivations are self-reflexively exposed and considered in the play, they are ignored completely by Guy in his avaricious careerism and subsequent descent into evil.

During the first dinner party Roman Castavet seduces Guy with his knowledge of theatre history and exaggerated faith in Guy's acting ability. When Roman tells Guy he is "sure" Guy played the lead in Luther, Guy corrects him by saying that Roman merely saw a gesture he used while playing a minor role. Roman is able to stroke Guy's vanity and reveal his superficial involvement in his art; Guy's gullibility is also exposed when he is held enraptured by Roman's obviously fabricated tales of his past life in theatre and his close acquaintance with personalities like Johnston Forbes-Robertson. In a second viewing this scene is particularly telling as the moment when the devil reveals himself. On one level this is made obvious by Roman's "universal" experience; Roman gets his guests' attention by his travel stories: "I've been everywhere...you name it, I've been there." Only God or the devil could be everywhere. Roman is careful not to offer criticisms, only compliments: "Fine city Omaha, Baltimore is too." This scene also marks the carrot-on-the-stick temptation offered to Guy as Roman reveals that his power is linked somehow to entrepreneurial capitalism. Roman tells Guy that his trips around the world were for "business and pleasure" and that he was involved in "just about every kind of business...wool, sugar, toys, machine parts, marine insurance, oil...."

The dinner party the Castavets have for the Woodhouses also marks the first reference to the traditional notion of the devil as beguiler who plays upon the basic instability and incipient irrationality of the community. Some critiques of this film argue that Polanski shows an inconsistency, since the cynical and humorous debunking of "witchhunting" in American life is offset by the belief that devils do exist and will overcome those who abandon their belief in God. This view overlooks the film's strong parodical element that attacks all fixations of American culture with the criticism that demons hold sway precisely because of the insubstantial nature of belief; in the current society, religion is one more fleeting satisfaction.

The institution of marriage is the first subject of critical assault when Rosemary's anxiety comes into focus simultaneously with Guy's seduction by Roman. This element has frequently been touched on as a key to interpreting the film, but it is useful to examine it here as an aspect of apocalypse projected from the individual mind. Rosemary's gradual discovery of the diabolical conspiracy seems coextensive with her realization of her basic distrust of Guy. In fact, if one were to remove the demonic plot entirely (something Polanski seems to invite), the film appears at one level to be a dark satire of married life similar to Kubrick's The Shining. This satire is given greater dramatic force through the Woodhouses' relationship to the Castavets, the young couple to the old couple. Because of the secret contract between Guy and Roman, the Woodhouses are constantly surrounded by the Castavets and their elderly friends, all of whom belong to the witches' coven. As Rosemary's pregnancy becomes increasingly difficult she decides to throw a party for her personal friends, where "you have to be under sixty to get in." The

presences of the doting, overbearing Castavets and the other witches suggest the weight of a decadent past bearing down on the present, a reification of the Terrible House story told by Hutch about the origins and evil history of the Bramford. While the party for the younger friends seems to bring a breath of fresh air, the event is fleeting and its value to Rosemary negligible. One of Rosemary's girlfriends convinces her to go back to Dr. Hill (regarded as a "dreamboy"), an action with ironic consequences for Rosemary.

The unstable nature of Rosemary's marriage is evidenced during the Castavets' party, when Rosemary helps Minnie wash dishes while Guy and Roman chat. Rosemary takes a brief glance at the living room but can see only a cloud of cigarette smoke. The brief shot is compelling in its revelation of Rosemary's suspicion and insecurity, and her unwillingness to assert herself by asking questions; when she does return to the living room it is apparent Guy and Roman were in an unusually intimate and clandestine conversation.

Rosemary's unwillingness to rock the boat remains constant even when Guy's behavior becomes bizarre, even shocking. When Rosemary awakens from her drugged sleep (during which the demonic conception occurs) she discovers scratches on her body; Guy admits he made love to her when she was unconscious, assuring her "it was fun, in a necrophile sort of way." Guy leaves the house at odd hours, at one point claiming he has a yen for ice cream. When Rosemary wants to return to Dr. Hill, Guy vehemently protests, saying "it isn't fair to Sapirstein," which throws Rosemary into a confused outrage. Guy's destruction of the book on witchcraft bequeathed to Rosemary by Hutch is a turning point; shortly thereafter Rosemary decides Guy must be a part of the conspiracy.

The strained relationship Rosemary has with her husband is to be compared with Rosemary's easy affection for Hutch, who is the only sympathetic character in the film. Guy Woodhouse, particularly in the characterization by John Cassavetes, is a dour and unsavory personality in marked contrast to the wholesome Hutch. Hutch is in contrast to Guy also by his urbane manner, inquisitiveness, and lack of overwhelming career goals. He is a writer, and when he tries to warn Rosemary about the witches Guy balks: "All those boys' adventure novels have gone to his head." Hutch represents a genuinely spiritual and intellectual side of life Rosemary lost when she entered her stultifying marriage and life at the Bramford. Hutch stands for a kind of fulfillment outside organized religion or the oppression of middle-class life located in Guy and the Castavets. Hutch is automatically regarded with suspicion by Roman Castavet and vice versa; Roman decides Hutch must be eliminated after their first meeting. Since Hutch is practically able to reach out from the grave with the book for Rosemary, he has almost as much supernatural ability as the witches.

Hutch's inquiring intellectualism is the real threat to the witches. Guy regards Hutch as an oddball as Guy grows steadily closer to Minnie and Roman. Hutch notes the peculiar charm Minnie gave Rosemary and investigates it; he also notes Roman's "pierced ears and piercing eyes," characteristics which apparently spur his full-scale probe of the Castavets, resulting in the posthumous gift to Rosemary. When Rosemary opens the book All of Them Witches she temporarily inherits Hutch's soul. She begins a methodical study of witchcraft that takes her to bookstores and libraries, areas previously out of her purview and field of interest. She uses her Scrabble set (which she earlier used to wile away time with Guy) to discover that "Roman Castavet" is an anagram for "Steven Marcato," the

son of the notorious witch whose story Hutch recounted when the Woodhouses moved into the Bramford.

An issue of Polanski's fable may be that Rosemary is able to identify evil only in demonic terms, and that she is unable to attain an overview permitting a clear perception of the nature of evil. Hutch's critical attitude comes to Rosemary too late, evidenced in her continued trust of Guy and her decision to transfer to Dr. Hill. Dr. Hill, certainly a less formidable person than Sapirstein, actually summarizes the situation well in his comforting statement to Rosemary: "I don't believe in witches, but there are a lot of crazy people running around." Indeed. Hill's betrayal of Rosemary is not based on his disbelief in her story or his affiliation with witchcraft, but on his unwillingness to oppose distinguished senior members of his profession. Hill perks up when Rosemary mentions Sapirstein's name, marking the point when Hill decides Rosemary is another woman made hysterical by her pregnancy. From this point on Rosemary can only descend into genuine hysteria and attempt futile escape, until she decides to give in and rock the cradle of Satan. At last even the devil's face is not so repugnant to her; as Roman remarks: "Aren't you his mother?" Rosemary, like it or not, is part of the conspiracy, and the devil is her product. Polanski's overly-literalized parodistic recreation of the Nativity in the last scene presents as many problems as the ending of Night of the Demon, except for the final equation of evil with conformism and "normality."

At various points Rosemary's Baby attempts an ideological critique but is ultimately an apocalyptic work since, like The Confidence-Man and the mainstream of American apocalyptic fiction, it focuses on the deep corruption of humanity and its ability to be gulled. Rosemary's Baby, like The Confidence-Man, attends to the notion that

...the Puritan belief in innate depravity has come full circle; the false teaching that depraved men are fascinated with is a naive optimism about the human potential.¹⁶

The Puritan ethic survives in Rosemary's situation as the dream of success which is fundamental to American life, causing a schizophrenia and self-loathing in Rosemary as early as her childhood. Rosemary's Baby is very much about America at a crisis point in the 1960s, a fact made stronger in Ira Levin's novel than in Polanski's film, no doubt because some elements were too volatile for cinema even in the relative freedom of 1968.

For example, the novel adds some significant details to one of the dream sequences. When Rosemary is drugged as part of her preparation for the Black Mass, she envisions herself aboard a yacht with President Kennedy, the Kennedy clan, and celebrities like Sarah Churchill. In her dream Rosemary sees that JFK is in his Navy uniform and "completely recovered from the assassination...look(ing) better than ever."¹⁷ At the helm is a Negro mate to whom JFK gives terse orders. Rosemary sees Hutch standing alone on the dock "with armloads of weather-forecasting equipment."¹⁸ Rosemary asks the President: "Isn't Hutch coming with us?," to which JFK replies "Catholics only...I wish we weren't bound by these prejudices, but unfortunately we are."¹⁹ In her drugged state Rosemary hallucinates being carried through the Sistine Chapel, when in reality she is being taken to the witches' lair for the satanic rites. Later in the dream

¹⁶John R. May, Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1972), p. 73.

¹⁷Ira Levin, Rosemary's Baby (New York: Dell Books, 1967), p. 79.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

Hutch reappears:

"Typhoon!" Hutch shouted from the dock amid all his weather-forecasting equipment. "Typhoon! It killed fifty-five people in London and it's heading this way." And Rosemary knew he was right. She must warn the President. The ship was heading for disaster.

But the President was gone. Everyone was gone. The deck was infinite and bare, except for, far away, the Negro mate holding the wheel unremittingly on course.²⁰

While this sequence is recreated very faithfully in the film, President Kennedy is not portrayed as the captain of the ship, deflating much of the dream's significance. Clearly the scene is concerned with a foundering ship of state/fools similar in some respects to the Fidele in The Confidence-Man. Rosemary is enchanted with the Kennedy charisma and pretends that the assassination never happened. She accepts prejudice according to Kennedy's tautological reasoning, and accepts the safe cocoon of Catholicism although fascinated with Hutch and his prophecies. The Negro mate accepts a seemingly important and prestigious job, only to find himself abandoned and at the forefront of destruction.

It takes little psychoanalysis to understand how this scene reflects the frustrations within Rosemary's unconscious mind and the contradictions of her life. Even more important is the scene's relevance to understanding Rosemary's Baby as the apocalypse in microcosm, a disaster located first in individual failure and the attempt at repression which is portrayed (certainly through the dream sequence) as collective. Rosemary's religious thinking is more Calvinist than Catholic, with its emphasis on retribution, material prosperity, and the inefficacy of human action. Hutch's analytical mind is compelling but dangerous; it is better to drift safely in the arms of a charismatic, paternalistic protector. The whipped-cream dream of pros-

²⁰Ibid.

perity suddenly threatened by a storm makes Rosemary a symbol of America, and her "baby" a symbol of the corruption her dream has wrought. Hutch's typhoon warning, with its mention of victims in London, refers to his atrocity stories but also to the failures of oligarchy in the old world, which America pretended to escape. There is no irony to the presence of the Kennedys in Rosemary's dream. This interest in an American aristocracy compares well with Rosemary's forced subservience to authoritarian systems, from her grammar school days to her relationship with Guy, culminating in her victimization by the Satanists. When Rosemary conceives her "baby" Guy is transformed into the devil, and the sex act is the rape of an unconscious woman.

Rosemary's Baby is an apocalyptic work in a sense different from the films of Hooper, Craven, and Cronenberg. Whereas these films accept the inevitable reversion of civilization to primordial chaos and barbarism, Rosemary's Baby is more a cautionary fable. Although its ending is bleak, with the final shot pulling away from the Dakota (a lullaby on the soundtrack) to suggest that this new, terrible evil will continue in the humdrum and mind-deadening fashion of the old, the narrative shows some obvious areas where Rosemary (and America) went wrong. It is once again not the nature of the apocalyptic work to offer a glimmer of optimism about society or the individual human being. Rosemary's Baby puts some distance between itself and the apocalypse, however, choosing not to describe the nature of the crisis to follow.

By using the theme of the devil child, Rosemary's Baby debunks superstition along with organized religion. The film contends that the institution of the church has become at best an abstraction (a media happening), since it signifies little but a constant sense of anxiety in

Rosemary, and is a weak ally in the face of "a lot of crazy people" who conspire in genuine evil. This film is largely responsible for making popular the theme of the devil loose in American society, entering ordinary households, corrupting everyday people before finding a way to a position of power. Unlike many of its progeny in the sub-genre, this film uses the devil as an allegorical device for a sweeping criticism of society. It demonstrates how society is easily gulled by its own collective beliefs. This perhaps marks the point of departure for the demonic possession film from other fiction dealing with the reign of the devil on earth. Many earlier works of American fiction show the power of the devil increasing as people betray religious creeds and societal codes; the demonic possession film of the 1970s shows the devil succeeding because these creeds and codes have been accepted and internalized, a process which itself causes the death of society.

The traditional image of the devil and the use of his image as a narrative device are emphasized (The Omen) or de-emphasized (It's Alive) as filmmakers find less need for the supernatural to assist in criticisms of society or for expansive metaphors of society's failure. As discussed earlier, the horror film continues the apocalyptic tradition insofar as it shows the devil to be "real," suggesting the inherent evil of man and the violation of sacred contracts. Where the devil becomes metaphorical in art, the prospects for society's survival may be equally grim, but the focus is generally on the failure of social systems rather than human nature. The latter tendency reveals the real contribution of the demonic possession cycle, but the compelling issue becomes the ways by which a tendency in art is reversed or made to overlap with traditional ideas of evil, the devil, and the end of man.

III

Discussions of William Friedkin's The Exorcist (1973) remind one of how increasingly difficult it is to support an auteur theory of filmmaking or to speak of the film itself as a discrete object. Although The Exorcist was directed by Friedkin and has some similarity to his other films (particularly Cruising and The French Connection, which in a few respects can help illuminate The Exorcist), Friedkin is working from a popular novel. Unlike Polanski in Rosemary's Baby (also a close cinematic rendering of a book), Friedkin's personality does not supercede the author's, who in this instance also wrote the screenplay and stayed in such close contact with the project he was finally asked to leave the set.²¹ The author is of course William Peter Blatty, a lapsed Catholic and ex-seminarian who wrote the novel "as a love letter to the Jesuits"²² for his education. Blatty's personality became very interwoven with the extraordinary notoriety and success of the book and film. Blatty has always attempted to characterize this project as part of his personal on-going search for spiritual enlightenment and during the 1970s sought to explain The Exorcist partially in those terms. But this spiritual involvement with his art has been heavily undercut by Blatty's unabashed recollections of how he convinced studio executives to give his film the same "pace" and "excitement" of The French Connection by hiring Friedkin to direct.²³

Blatty's peculiar theology and the interests of Hollywood studios

²¹David Bartholomew, "The Exorcist: the Book, the Movie, the Phenomenon," Cinefantastique, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 10.

²²Ibid., p. 9.

²³William Peter Blatty, William Peter Blatty on "The Exorcist": From Novel to Film (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 41.

are adjacent to another issue relevant to understanding the success and influence of this film: The Exorcist as "cultural phenomenon." During the ballyhoo surrounding the film's initial box office bonanza, many stories circulated in the media concerning renewed interest in the population about exorcism and the supernatural.²⁴ Clergymen apparently reported (to whom?) an increase in people either asking questions about possession or reporting actual incidents of demonic possession. Coverage of the film's commercial triumph included comments on the unusual nature and behavior of its audience. There are many now-legendary stories of how early audiences for The Exorcist were frequently hysterical; many viewers supposedly emulated the action on the screen by vomiting, urinating, and fainting.²⁵ Some audiences apparently turned violent while waiting long hours for tickets. The controversy engendered by the film spurred many religious leaders to take to the pen or the pulpit to comment on The Exorcist's spiritual worth or moral danger. While fundamentalist ministers such as Billy Graham soundly condemned the film and novel, conservative Catholic publications like the Catholic Voice and Triumph praised the film for its spiritual insight and the support it seemed to give for Catholicism; on the other hand, the liberal Commonweal thought the film to be spiritually and intellectually vacuous.²⁶

The central issue here may be the number of people who accepted The Exorcist as a legitimate discussion of religious ideas and were obviously

²⁴Bartholomew, "The Exorcist," pp. 10-12.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Blatty is famous for his derisions of progressive Catholic periodicals. He praises conservative publications, including Civiltà Cattolica, the Vatican literary journal, for their support of his film. See William Peter Blatty on "The Exorcist," pp. 35-36.

encouraged in this thinking by the authors of the film. An even more important issue in the success of The Exorcist is its precise depiction of the devil and demonic possession (a good deal different from Rosemary's Baby), which would strongly influence the emerging demonic possession sub-genre over the next decade. The Exorcist is a dramatic and sophisticated reaffirmation that the devil is external to human experience. While there are reasons for interpreting demonism in this film in terms of evidence of social breakdown, The Exorcist tends to refuse this type of investigation, which is very opposite to the stance of Rosemary's Baby. The Exorcist as mass ritual can be illuminated as one applies anthropological and psychological readings to the phenomenon the film describes, and by so doing look to the heart of the "spiritual crisis" preoccupying the work.

Just as Blatty attempts to portray the devil as external, the film as an object of perception works to convey this metaphysical notion by deliberately overwhelming the spectator. The Exorcist represents one more high-point in the American film industry when the medium follows the thinking of Griffith and Gance rather than Eisenstein.²⁷ The new technology developed for cinema in the 1970s (especially Dolby multi-track stereo) has consistently removed the dominant proportion of it from a self-reflexive (except for a frequently allusionistic) stance. William Friedkin has called The Exorcist "a realistic look at inexplicable events,"²⁸ and Blatty has buttressed this with the statement that "...only in fantasy can the author

²⁷A good recent comparison of the two aesthetics is Peter Pappas, "The Superimposition of Vision: Napoleon on the Meaning of Fascist Art," in Cineaste, Vol. XI, No. 2, p. 4. The best sources on Eisenstein's aesthetics are, of course, Jay Leyda's translations of The Film Sense and Film Form, both published by Harcourt, Brace, and World.

²⁸Blatty, William Peter Blatty on "The Exorcist," p. 37.

be omniscient. We can get inside the heads of humans; not of demons."²⁹ But psychological investigation and realism are clearly not what The Exorcist supports. On the contrary, both the style and the content of the film deny rational interpretation--the objective analysis of the viewer--and support instead a fabricated and cleverly sustained illusion advanced as reality. Although the film supplies us with more than sufficient tools for its deconstruction, a point of The Exorcist is to mystify and to deflect the attempt at reducing signification. In this The Exorcist is certainly not unusual, and shows the continued capability of the Hollywood industry and dominant ideology to absorb modernism in order to enhance the basic characteristics of illusionist cinema. What is unusual about The Exorcist's illusion is the function of its modernist style and archaic content in perpetuating old ideas of evil and apocalypse.

The apocalypse of The Exorcist is inextricably tied to its notion of evil. It must be emphasized that this is an apocalyptic work, one whose concept of the end of man and spiritual rebirth can be seen as the lawful consequence of a much-adulterated Catholic definition of evil. One must say "adulterated" because the cause-effect relationship of evil and the reign of the devil is made deliberately obscure, often contradicting even antiquated theological views, including the Catholicism to which Blatty pays homage. The Exorcist's overwhelming vision of evil has no doubt been successful because it is not "sectarian" and is able to communicate to many sectors of the public. Its vision relies on an older, determinist view that Rosemary's Baby rejected, but it is precisely this vision that has been the mainstay of apocalypticism in American art.

In Blatty's novel, as in the film, there is a prologue taking place

²⁹Ibid.

in Iraq. Father Merrin, the exorcist, is shown at an archeological dig at Nineveh. The novel's prologue is concluded with a scene very carefully rendered on film:

The man in khaki prowled the ruins. The temple of Nabu. The temple of Ishtar. He sifted vibrations. At the palace of Ashurbanipal he paused; then shifted a sidelong glance to a limestone statue hulking in situ: ragged wings; taloned feet; bulbous, jutting, stubby penis and a mouth stretched taut in a feral grin. The demon Pazuzu.

Abruptly he sagged.

He knew.

- It was coming.

He stared at the dust. Quickening shadows. He heard dim yappings of savage dog packs prowling the fringes of the city. The orb of the sun was beginning to fall below the rim of the world. He rolled his shirt sleeves down and buttoned them as a shivering breeze sprang up. Its source was southwest.³⁰

The sentence "the orb of the sun was beginning to fall below the rim of the world" is enough to establish a concept of apocalypse and an Evil Age. The striking realization of the above scene is also used to characterize the loosing of Satan in terms not only of a supernatural revenge on the world for its falling out with God, but also an epic confrontation between a saintly hero--a shaman--and the devil. In this instance the shaman does not necessarily assume the role of a representative of the community, one who through mastery of supernatural elements and knowledge of the community is able to transform or drive out violence or other "impurities"³¹ that signify a malady in the overall society. Father Merrin's (Max Von Sydow³²) confrontation with Pazuzu sets up this situation while

³⁰William Peter Blatty, The Exorcist (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 8.

³¹The power of the ritual to drive out impurities is analyzed in René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 28-31, passim.

³²It may be worthwhile to an intertextual analysis of this film to consider Von Sydow's long association with roles concerned with the

also establishing the essential nature of this film's apocalypse.

The Iraq sequence, indeed the entire opening of the film, demonstrates the attempt to maintain (in semiological terms) "the hypostatized result of a genesis effaced."³³ Interestingly, semiology may reveal not only the particular illusionism of The Exorcist but its tremendous contradiction of Christian theology along with science through the mechanisms of this illusion; a separate case can be made for The Exorcist's rejection of early Christianity's attempt to unveil the reification of the signifier, which in the teachings of Christ is shown to augment through intellectual processes the spiritual sclerosis Christianity addressed.³⁴ The Exorcist refuses this unmasking and portrays the chief signifier--the devil--as an impenetrable enigma while simultaneously offering other signifiers that are deliberately removed from any causal relationship with the central issue of the narrative.

The film opens with the Warner Communications logo, the main title, and the author's name (without further credits) in elite red-on-black

"crisis of faith," from his work with Ingmar Bergman to his introduction to the American cinema in the role of Christ in George Stevens' The Greatest Story Ever Told.

³³Fredric Jameson discusses this concept, made popular by the Tel Quel group in France, in The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 181.

³⁴Christ's famous discourse on semiology is in St. Matthew 16:1: And the Pharisees and Sadducees came to him to test him, and they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. But answering them he said, "When it is evening you say, 'The weather will be fair, for the sky is red,' And in the morning you say, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and lowering.' You know then how to read all these things, but cannot read the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation needs a sign, but no sign shall be given it but the sign of Jonas."

lettering. The main title is thus able by itself to draw the viewer into an acceptance of the film's amorphous sense of evil. Black plus the primary color signify not only ecclesiastical rites but their converse in Satanic ritual and have a long history in popular iconography. The main title stands by itself except for the omniscient author. The film becomes a privileged artifact and a cultural event having no connection to any other aspect of culture or to production; this is amplified further by the notion that the supernatural aspect of this horror film is indeed "religious," transcendental, of overwhelming cosmic significance and therefore worthy of being perceived with high seriousness, an "important" work of art.

The portentous tone of the credits is enhanced as the title lap-dissolves into the Iraq sequence. On the soundtrack during the credits we hear some fragments of musique concrète melding into an Islamic call to prayer. The soundtrack is especially important to this film in its ability to sustain an effect rather than to punctuate dramatic high-points. The sustaining of effect in turn prevents the spectator from differentiating one concept from another and from applying any principle of causality to an analysis of the film. The sounds of dogs barking, insects buzzing, and pigs squealing are superimposed on the soundtrack and combined with the work of such modernist composers as Krzysztof Penderecki, Hans Werner Henze, and George Crumb to create the horrific atmosphere and the sense of an Evil Age. The association of modernism with evil, and the use of avant-garde music in particular to underscore an impending doom, have become prevalent in modern cinema, and The Exorcist is noteworthy for the way it has informed the horror film on the use of the avant-garde for effect.³⁵ Henze, a committed, radical artist, is thus divorced from a cul-

³⁵Penderecki's work is also prominent on the soundtrack of Kubrick's The Shining. The importance of the soundtrack to The

tural and ideological context. Penderecki, who has dedicated two of his major works to the victims of Auschwitz and Hiroshima,³⁶ and whose opera The Devils of Loudon is concerned, like Huxley's novel, with exposing the psychological and social factors underneath the concept of possession, is also easily absorbed by the film. It is significant in this regard that Blatty's novel features several epigraphs, including a vignette involving a man being tortured by the Mafia and the names "Dachau," "Belsen," "Buchenwald." With this perspective, the "ominous" aspects of Penderecki and Henze take precedence over the intellectual worth and critical stance of their art. Just as the Mafia and Nazism (and Communism) are shown simply as manifestations of an Evil Age, art itself becomes a dangerous effect supernaturally born out of this age; Penderecki and Henze are producers of a decadent style--music as bizarre sound effect--rather than annotators of cultural and ideological processes. This blurring of elements into an amorphous effect includes the use of the Iraq setting. The Islamic call to prayer segues into other "sound effects" to connote evil. The exotic is shown to be threatening, as demonstrated later in Merrin's experience in Mosul. The impending cosmic crisis encompasses civilization of East and West, suggesting that the very specific crisis in Georgetown (a crisis often couched in sexual terms) is similarly manifest in Iraq (the sexual threat is implied in the giant phallus on the statue of Pazuzu).

The Iraq sequence is important primarily for its characterization of Father Merrin. While The Exorcist attempts to reinstate meaning in the

Exorcist as specific effect is in Cindy Ehrlich, "Doin' the Devil's Sound Effects," Rolling Stone, 28 February 1974, p. 16.

³⁶The works in question are Dies Irae: Auschwitz Oratorio and To the Victims of Hiroshima (Threnody for 52 string instruments).

myth of the shaman and the shaman's ability to ward off the sacrificial crisis that occurs when myth, through repetition, becomes devoid of meaning, the film constantly undermines its own project, affirming our contention that the metalanguage of cinema is itself empty of meaning as it bankrupts itself in repetition. The greatest irony to The Exorcist is its attempt to repeat the role of priest-as-hero, warding off violence, in the new "enlightened" context of the horror film. An analysis of Father Merrin's character profits from attention to René Girard's thesis that

Religion invariably strives to subdue violence, to keep it from running wild. Paradoxically, the religious and moral authorities in a community attempt to instill nonviolence, as an active force into daily life and as a mediating force into ritual life, through the application of violence. Sacrificial rites serve to connect the moral and religious aspects of daily life, but only by means of a lengthy and hazardous detour. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that the efficacy of the rites depends on their being performed in the spirit of pietas, which marks all aspects of religious life. We are beginning to understand why the sacrificial act appears as both sinful and saintly, an illegal as well as legitimate exercise of violence.³⁷

Although The Exorcist seems to speak to the ascendancy of religion and mysticism in daily life, and of the power of ritual to draw the community together, the text of the film reveals the very modern ambivalence toward religion that Girard may feel is a lawful outgrowth of the nature of religious ritual. Father Merrin, a character modelled on Teilhard de Chardin,³⁸ is a scientist and philosopher, but also, as Chris MacNeil terms him, a "witchdoctor." The elderly Merrin is shown to be physically and emotionally unsteady from his long battles with evil. Merrin sees what the viewer sees operating in the world of the film: an overpowering sense of evil moving toward a crisis point. When Merrin examines artifacts from the Nineveh dig a clock stops, suggesting that

³⁷Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 20.

³⁸Blatty, William Peter Blatty on "The Exorcist," p. 32.

the hour of reconciliation is at hand. The trauma of this evil, evil which Merrin sees in the faces of ordinary people in Iraqi street bazaars, causes him to take a nitroglycerine tablet for his failing heart. Merrin's visions are complemented by Father Karras's experiences in New York, such as when he passes a bunch of street toughs stripping a car as he goes to visit his stricken mother. On the one hand there is an obvious argument for the evil we see in Regan MacNeil being the projection of two men who see themselves failing at their ritual function, but the attention to the demon as an external force tends to belie this interpretation. What is acknowledged is that the pervasive presence of the Evil Age signals the failure of the individual and the community, and both can be salvaged only by attention to the most capricious aspects of the supernatural, to which the individual is not connected (after all, the exorcism as such fails); what is so contradictory in this aspect of the film's argument is the evidence that the supernatural has failed because it has been depleted of its ritual significance.

Whereas Teilhard de Chardin used science to uncover God's presence, Merrin's own conjunction of faith and reason is never clear. At the dig in Iraq Merrin discovers a St. Joseph medal ("Not of the same period") next to a small clay head of a demon. Merrin is alarmed, offers no explanation, and accepts the scene apparently as more evidence of the approaching clash of cosmic forces. At the Mosul exhibit Merrin merely catalogues and examines data; he leaves the exhibit to go and stand in front of the statue of Pazuzu, accepting the inevitable.

Most of the scenes in Georgetown coincide with the mood established by the Iraq sequence that evil has overcome the world and that science has no efficacy. Science is shown to be impotent, a theme made

explicit when Regan grabs the genitals of her hypnotist. The hospital devices used for the brain scan are medieval torture instruments incapable of driving out the demon. Chris MacNeil's disdain for religion is transformed as she helps the self-doubting Father Karras through the conflict brought on by his allegiance to both science and the priesthood: religion is what Chris hysterically demands, as hysterically as she demanded a medical cure from the doctors at the clinic. Karras's last attempt at manifesting his scientific persona occurs when he tries to explain the various personalities Regan has manifested; Merrin replies point-blank: "There is only one."

Science is dispensed with since the film views evil as the disappearance of rationality, but this loss is seen as necessary given the acknowledged worthlessness of the intellect. With rationality gone, only the shaman (who in tradition has previously been steeped in or inoculated with the supernatural) can save the community.³⁹ This line of reasoning is supported when we learn of Merrin's previous experience at exorcism (once in Africa, a matrix of primeval myth and ritual practice), his solitary and mystical nature. When a young priest delivers Chris MacNeil's telegram to Merrin, he puts it in his pocket unopened and continues to meditate. We have touched on demonic possession as a projection of characters in a narrative, and what is significant here is the tradition that portrays the visionary ascetic as the creator of demons. Ascetics, such as St. Anthony, with their isolation and extreme physical debility, project demons that are manifestations of their own wants, fears, and frustrations.⁴⁰

³⁹Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 286.

⁴⁰This idea is suggested in Angus Fletcher's discussion of the demonic agent, Allegory, p. 36.

This description accords well with Merrin, whose isolated asceticism makes him more formidable and resolute than the more worldly Father Karras.

The nature of society's dysfunction and the efficacy of the priests' ritual constitute the problematical core of the film. In many respects the demonic possession of Regan MacNeil could be what structural anthropology would call a sacrificial scapegoating meant to expel violence and drive out a malady threatening the community. Because the demon is so objectified, however, the form of crisis controlling society is never acknowledged and the genuinely mythic function of exorcism is denied, or, rather, treated on the superficial level of spectacle.

Some persuasive arguments have been offered suggesting that the crisis is predominantly sexual. The independent, sexually aggressive woman (Chris MacNeil) is at the forefront of the narrative, and the earliest signs of Regan's possession occur as Chris argues bitterly over the telephone concerning matters relating to her estranged husband. A psychoanalytic examination of this film could obviously take several paths. The Oedipal situation is made apparent at various levels; both Chris and Regan want to possess the phallus, exemplified in Chris's obscene language, the demands she places on men, and Regan's overt sexuality and her assault on men during her possessions (she grabs a psychiatrist by the testicles). The exorcism could be said to restore sexual equilibrium by first putting "a man in the house," and then by quieting both Chris's and Regan's anger, which is demonstrated most often in sexual terms. The associations of evil not only with sexuality (Regan's masturbation and obscenities; Chris's profane language; Karras's seething frustrations; the suggested relationship between Chris and Burke Dennings; the tension between Chris and Karras) but with the human being's overall animal

nature recur frequently. An anthropological reading may be as justified when it is apparent that a sacrificial crisis is occurring, and there is some doubt over the efficacy of exorcism and the scapegoating of Regan.

A reading of the exorcism as scapegoat ritual is sensible for various reasons. There is little question that the film, in content and style, acknowledges a transpsychical crisis. The unconscious mind is recognized as Karras's dreams connect his anxieties over his mother's death to the impending confrontation with Satan. In his dream Karras sees his mother emerging from a subway exit (a rather clumsy reference to the unconscious mind itself); the image is rapidly followed by a shot of the St. Joseph medal and a devil-dog, both of which figured prominently in the Iraq sequence. The connection to Iraq, although obscure, can be justified. The crisis of the dying Father Merrin may be characterized as the shaman's loss of power, coinciding with Karras's increased secularization, his dependence on science, and his loss of faith. The crises of the two shamans are shown to extend to the community, creating the preliminary circumstances of the sacrificial crisis: the household has been upset, the church has been desecrated, and the religious sector has become secularized (the glad-handed Father Dyer and the Jesuit officials at Georgetown University). Regan's worsening appearance and the very fact of her possession function to display her as the symbol of crisis simply by her great difference, which points to a "tear in the social fabric"⁴¹ that must be immediately addressed. Girard remarks:

In primitive societies...the slightest change in the status in the change of an isolated individual is treated as if it carried the potential to create a major crisis. What appear to us to be perfectly normal and predictable transitions, essential to the

⁴¹Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 281.

preservation of the social unit, are regarded by primitive man as portents of apocalyptic upheaval.⁴²

Regan's possession as contagious disease is apparent in her many diagnoses by physicians. When no cure is available Regan is restrained, kept locked away in a sequestered upstairs room. The confinement of Regan upstairs recalls the first "rumblings in the attic" when Chris thinks the house is rat-infested. The attic is a useful symbol, signifying, as Bachelard has remarked, a fear that is effaced with daylight, in contrast to the cellar, which does not admit light.⁴³ The metaphor is apt since science is not able to shed light on the problem as easily as Chris is able earlier on to rationalize her unease. The evil can finally only be stored away in the hope that contagion will not spread before a cure can be found.

Regan's confinement also suggests the conundrum to demonic possession and exorcism that the film does not seek to expose. Lévi-Strauss has remarked that possession and belief in magic occur only with consensual belief; similarly, a cure is effected out of belief in the efficacy of magic. Regan's possession may be seen as precipitated by the attention focused on her, first by her solicitous mother, later by the medical community. Her isolation from society, denying her the reference systems of group support and contact with external reality, logically aggravate the crisis. The conventions of Gothic cinema obviously call for the uncanny to take place in shadow, but could Regan's transformation be maintained in a clearly-lighted social setting? The physical symptoms Regan demonstrates, including her refusal of food, her vomiting, dehy-

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 3-37.

dration, and drop in blood pressure noted by Karras, are also discussed by Lévi-Strauss as symptoms of the victim who has internalized the beliefs of the collectivity about the nature of illness.⁴⁴ As a doctor Karras seems to understand this basic intellectual foundation of possession and warns against exorcism, then refuses his own diagnosis. The significant point here is that while the narrative contains an equation of the exorcist with psychiatrist (a traditional equation in anthropology), with the patient as passive receptor of a therapy, the exorcism is not geared toward providing the possessed with a language for the expression of the dominating force (also a function validating anthropology's sorcerer/physician equation).⁴⁵ Whereas traditional shamanism is aimed, according to anthropology, at bringing to the surface elements of the unconscious, the ritual performed by Merrin and Karras shows no attempt to address a direct relationship between Regan's own personality and the demon. There is no question that Merrin is depicted as hero, an "object of transference... at the head of a supernatural battalion of spirits [penetrating] the endangered organs [to] free the captive soul."⁴⁶ The lack of a fuller psychological dimension to Regan reinforces the view that the crisis is in the priests themselves and the community, especially since religious language doesn't effect a cure.

The irony of the crisis's primitive nature is underscored by its setting in Christianity, but it is also the irony that makes the work

⁴⁴Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 167-85.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 198-99.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 199.

apocalyptic. The narrative suggests that the sacrifice of Christ did not, after all, prevent further episodes of collective and scapegoat violence. Violence on all fronts, which precedes a sacrificial scapegoating,⁴⁷ is shown (and yet denied) as the reason for the demonic appearance. The "mock combat"⁴⁸ between the exorcists themselves, during which Karras (the scientist) becomes an underling, recapitulates the violence of the community. Yet the ritual itself goes wrong. The therapeutic aspects of prayer and penance--their ability to "name" the illness and drive it out--are as in doubt during the exorcists' ritual as during Karras's Mass, when the consecration of the wine becomes a moment of confused introspection for the priest. He recites the offertory prayer as if ransacking the words for meaning. The need to repeat the phrase "The power of Christ compels you!" so many times during the exorcism ritual, while therapeutically expelling violence "on the empty air,"⁴⁹ also suggests the risk involved in depriving language of mythic significance by repetition, which constituted part of the crisis to begin with.

Very clearly Merrin's words do not have any efficacy in driving out the demon. If Merrin is one of Frazer's sickly kings now faltering in his task, Karras is hardly the young prince able to pick up the sceptre and restore magic and faith. Only Karras's willingness to become a scapegoat, suggesting his recognition of Christ as victim and the universality of victimization, rescues Regan. But once again the metaphysics of victimization are not acknowledged. The film is apocalyptic in a conservative sense since it does not admit to the mythical structures it describes, much

⁴⁷Girard, Violence and the Sacred, pp. 39-57.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 124.

less provide analysis of them.

"Conservative" is too weak a word to describe the rigidity of spirit and terror of change that characterize those societies in which the sacred holds sway. The imposition of a socio-religious order appears as an enormous boon, an un hoped-for act of grace that could at any moment be withdrawn. There is no question of subjecting the order to critical evaluation or comparison, of trying to alter and improve it in any way. The primitive mind would regard such endeavors as at once impious and insane, guaranteed to provoke the violent retribution of the gods. The proper posture of man is watchfulness and immobility. A single careless gesture could unleash a holocaust in which society could be utterly destroyed.⁵⁰

The Exorcist adheres to the above sentiments as it suggests the apocalypse brought about by the failure of an old order that must be restored while simultaneously cohering to the "modern" apocalyptic spirit that current society is unrecuperable. Karras's Christ-like sacrifice may be pointless since it is unclear what type of order will follow Karras and Merrin after the Dionysianism has been expelled, whether a new shaman will absorb Karras's power or a new order substituted... The former is unlikely since the ineffectual and obsequious Father Dyer, although embraced by Regan, is recognized solely for the signification of his collar and its connection to the dead Karras. The latter is equally unlikely since Chris gives the St. Joseph medal to Dyer and neither she nor Regan shows any signs of a "spiritual rebirth"; Chris tells Dyer that Regan "can't remember anything." There is no indication that the exorcism has represented individual therapy or collective ritual in an efficacious way.

Unlike films in the preceding and succeeding chapters, The Exorcist's apocalypticism is not involved in the deconstruction of the apparati within its various themes. Because it shies away from such

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 282.

encounters it remains traditionally apocalyptic, maintaining the belief in an external agent that mediates desire and determines destiny, while evidencing a lack of confidence necessitated by this vulnerable position. The main dramatic focus of the narrative is the self-doubt and possible impotence of the exorcists rather than the actual possession. The "spiritual search" that is supposedly underneath Blatty's project makes numerous assumptions about the role of religion in pluralistic society and about the relationship of, say, religion to science. These assumptions lead to the use of signifiers such as blood, dirt, and urine to suggest the reign of evil; while these symbols have a tradition in Western iconography, it is naive and misleading at this date to use them to represent evil as an external agent. The enlightenment that this film aspires to cannot happen since it is fixated on the traditional fundamentalist apocalypse that, above all, denies humanity. It is therefore difficult to analyze the dysfunction of the collectivity that The Exorcist uses as its premise when the basic mechanisms of human activity are also shown by the film to be repulsive and worthless. In certain respects The Exorcist shows, in the manner of thinkers such as Frazer, an "enlightened" attitude toward the role of myth in society, but then shows tremendous trauma over any attempt to analyze or distance itself from myth. There is no irony in this trauma, however, since the refusal of analysis is born out of the reification of the signifier, the representation of illusion simultaneous with the analytical process, to a point where the most informed critical judgment must see The Exorcist largely as the sum of its effects, as a mesmerizing thrill show that reinforces "possession" by denying rational interpretation.

The place of The Exorcist in the history of the horror film is secure. It may be as important to the 1970s as Psycho was to the '60s,

but for very different reasons; one critic has gone so far as to call it (along with Rosemary's Baby) a "horror film of the Watergate era."⁵¹ It may be accurately described since the film shows traces of dominant ideology's need to admit to a crisis to reassert, half-heartedly, the same order, and to pretend that the crisis is aberrant. The film fits well within the contemporary apocalyptic horror genre because of the tenuousness of its premises and conclusions and because its most visible statements suggest an anxious ambiguity over any possible resolution to the crisis.

IV

The influences of Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist on the demonic possession film, indeed on the changing notion of evil in the modern horror genre, should be apparent; the two films set up a dialectic to which later works respond. While the cataclysm of Rosemary's Baby is inevitable and final, asserting very consciously the unrecuperability of the old order, the direct connection between Rosemary's unconscious mind and diabolism makes this film a "psychological thriller" far more than many demonic possession films to follow. The pessimism in this film remains in the fact that the old world, breeding as it does superstition and hysteria that impact on new generations, is too firmly entrenched to be forgotten.

It may be going too far to suggest that The Exorcist simply reinforces the old order. Although it seems to make a strong statement favoring organized religion as a means of providing cohesion to society,

⁵¹S.S. Prawer, Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 54.

much of this film demonstrates a profound confusion, an ambivalence about the efficacy of myth and ritual; this is evident in the consequences of exorcism on the life of the community. Much of this confusion may be grounded in the filmmakers' ambivalence and skepticism over the nature and value of religion in the modern context, compounded by an unwillingness to confront myth and ritual forthrightly from philosophical, psychological, ideological approaches. Nevertheless, one can refer to The Exorcist as a film bolstering a typically determinist view of apocalypse, with evil depicted as an external force activated by an unspecific rupture in a contract with God that is individual and collective. Man is a helpless agent, acting out rituals depleted in significance but which cannot be replaced.

It is reasonable to say that many horror films have inherited tendencies from Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist; that is, many films feel compelled to offer psychological and/or ideological rationales for the loosing of the devil and resultant Armageddon while refusing to dispense with fatalistic mystical/supernatural ideas. A noteworthy exception is Richard Donner's The Omen (1976) and its various sequels, which deal with the incarnation of the anti-Christ in a manner wholly dependent on Biblical prophecy, i.e., discounting the value of human intervention. Some progressive critics have termed The Omen "radical" because of its suggestion that the current bourgeois order is totally unsalvageable. This view makes us aware of how often very disparate political attitudes converge. The Omen is a perfect realization of the popular born-again fundamentalist belief that Satan will appear when power has been consolidated in a particular manner so as to necessitate the confrontation with Babylon. This view, which coheres very well with right-wing ideology, also holds that

the anti-Christ will occupy a seat of power in government or in the Catholic Church as both capitalist and socialist systems collapse--it is noteworthy that in The Omen the devil-child is adopted by the President and First Lady.

Brian DePalma's Carrie (1977), based on Stephen King's novel, is an often remarkable psychoanalytic approach to demonic possession. It substitutes possession as such with telekinetic power, introducing the "rage" theme evident in The Fury (also DePalma), Cronenberg's Scanners, and Phillippe Mora's The Beast Within. In Carrie telekinesis is not privileged unto itself; it is suggested as a form of rage growing within the hostile environment of an unremittingly repressive household and the blinkered, sadistic society of school and friends. Carrie's rage, culminating in the holocaust she unleashes after her humiliation at her senior prom, is made to lend itself to interpretation as a form of wish-fulfillment in the adolescent mind, connecting to feelings of self-loathing and omnipotence much more explicitly than in The Exorcist.⁵² When Carrie returns home in her bloody prom dress to destroy herself, her psychotic evangelist mother, and their home, her self-abasing rage can be seen as consequence and actualization of the apocalyptic temperament. The feeling of disgust at sexuality and contempt for human corruption is not shown to be confined to Carrie's mother. Carrie is tormented by her schoolmates about her fears related to menstruation, and her "liberal" mentor ends up laughing at her during Carrie's humiliation at the prom. A bucket of pig's blood (itself suggesting demonic ritual) is chosen by Carrie's enemies as the device in

⁵²Noël Carroll has suggested that the "rage" theme evident in many horror films can be understood through an application of Otto Kernberg's theory of narcissism. See Carroll's "Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings," Film Quarterly 3 (Spring 1981):16.

her humiliation; as in The Exorcist, blood is equated with filth, used to remind the individual of his/her animal origins. Blood also reminds Carrie of her sexual trauma, her rigid upbringing, and her inability to live the perfect near God-like existence imposed on her by her fanatical mother.

Carrie does not agonize over religious issues as does The Exorcist. DePalma's film shows apocalypse simply as self-fulfilling prophecy generated out of fundamentalist religion. Although it is clear that the film views religion negatively, it is equally obvious that Carrie's mother is so disturbed that she virtually reinvents Christianity, even down to a stylized crucifix resembling a voodoo doll. DePalma is not explicit on whether or not Margaret White's psychosis is generated out of the expectations imposed on her by her own puritanical upbringing, but this can be inferred by the references to her sex life with her husband and the trauma further instilled by his death. Thus Carrie describes critically an apocalypse as projection, explainable by several methods already touched on, including Girard's concept of the mediation of desire and conventional readings of narcissism.

A further significant inflection in the diabolism film is Larry Cohen's It's Alive! (1975). The poster art for the film shows a baby's bassinet with a small taloned hand inching over the side, an image recalling the line of films begun by Rosemary's Baby. This film is a totally "secular" retelling of Polanski's story, and in an ideologically informed way. The Davis family has a hideously deformed baby with abnormal strength and a killer instinct. There is no concrete explanation given for the child's appearance, and there are no quotations from Scripture nor hints of occultism. Pollution and a negligent drug company are possible causes, but Frank Davis is left in a quandary and shortly assumes personal guilt

for the child, apparent in his attempt to disown and later destroy it.

Unlike Guy Woodhouse in Rosemary's Baby, Frank Davis is a very ordinary, sympathetic character. Family life at the Davis house is reminiscent of that portrayed in 1950s television comedies like "Leave it to Beaver"; Frank is always gently teasing his wife and children, always taking for granted the comforts of his middle-class home while being a relaxed, comforting authority figure. He has the outgoing generosity of a good liberal, being a pal to a nervous father-to-be in a hospital waiting room, going so far as to offer the man the money he lost in a broken cigarette machine. The birth of the monster child brings about Frank's rapid disintegration, and the director uses the child as metaphor for an unrecuperable society in a stronger sense than did Rosemary's Baby. We are taken into the delivery room where Davis's wife, like Regan in The Exorcist, is a vulnerable specimen for the medical profession. But the doctors are not portrayed as demonic; as a doctor coaxes Lenore Davis through her delivery he makes soothing, humorous remarks just before he cuts her slightly with a scalpel ("that didn't hurt, now did it?"). Frank's discovering of what finally took place in the operating room is an unnerving epiphany that will become more traumatic as the event extends into every aspect of his life. The hospital scene appears to Frank as a reversal of everything he thought to be "normal" about behavior in such institutions. Frank sees a doctor stagger bleeding out of the delivery room, a scene followed by Frank's actual combat with doctors as Lenore lies helpless on the operating table. The doctors' first instinct is to kill the monster-child, reversing assumptions about a doctor's unswerving commitment to human life.

Such reversals continue as Frank loses his job at an advertising

firm while his avuncular boss feigns sympathy. Frank is fired precisely because he has become a victim of an image-making process he has spent a lifetime perpetuating. Further examples of the upheaval in Frank's life would only restate the film's basic thesis of the thin and easily penetrable veneer of bourgeois existence, with its irreconcilable contradictions and self-consuming tensions protected by an aura of ease and gentility. The most powerful metaphor Cohen uses to depict this crumbling facade is the comparison of the child to Frankenstein's monster (Frank Davis himself alludes to Frankenstein once in the film). The monster-child is in every sense a product of the world Frank represents. The possibility that the monster was brought into being by errors of science reinforces the Frankenstein analogy, as does the child's attempt to reunite with a cold and rejecting father. The police pursue the child much as the mob pursues the creature in Whale's Frankenstein; in this instance the reasons are more enunciated: the child represents an insult to the community as much as a physical threat. This reasoning is made clear as Frank, unlike Dr. Frankenstein, goes through a period of self-discovery where he recognizes a wholly different personal responsibility for the child than the one he initially perceived. He refuses to kill the child when he discovers it in a sewer (his own unconscious?) and turns his hostilities on the authorities. Although the police kill the child, radio reports of similar aberrant births conclude the film, suggesting that the concrete tangibility of this plague is far more threatening to society than the incursion of demons or superstition.

Frank La Loggia's Fear No Evil (1980) is a remarkable combination of an explicit and exact demonic possession theme with a critique of society, deftly synthesizing the impulses of most of the films touched

on here. Few films of the genre could be more apocalyptic, since the basic plot consists of an inflected re-telling of St. John's Revelation, including the raising of the dead on Judgment Day and the final conflict between the agents of God and Satan. The prologue to the film describes, using poor copies of images from Renaissance art, the expulsion of Lucifer from heaven by the archangels Raphael, Mikhail, and Gabrielle; the film deliberately uses the feminine variations on the latter two names for specific reasons.

The recounting of Lucifer's rebellion is followed by an episode taking place in upstate New York at a time before that containing the main body of the narrative. An elderly priest named Father Damon arrives by small boat to a ruined estate on the Hudson River. In a scene reminiscent of the paintings of Böcklin, Father Damon's solitary figure ascends a rocky coastline and disappears within the broken edifice of an oddly European villa. Father Damon is pursuing a wealthy, aristocratic country squire named Rossario Bonnamo, who is believed by Father Damon to be the incarnation of Satan. Damon eventually confronts the swarthy, bare-chested, and noticeably demonic Bonnamo inside the villa. A battle ensues, during which Bonnamo is destroyed, leaving Father Damon depleted and ill (another use of the Grail myth?). Damon warns the community that Satan's presence is still very real, but he is regarded by local clerics as a dangerous eccentric. Following Damon's passing the scene changes to a rural fishing village in 1963. The Williams family has a new baby boy named Andrew. The occasion is a time of great festivity for the Williams family and a source of considerable pride for Andrew's humble mailman father. The idyllic reconstruction of the early 1960s and the contexting of Andrew's birth in that time period are significant.

As the years move on Andrew becomes an attractive but extremely retiring and rather bookish adolescent. While Andrew appears to be an ideal son, family life for the Williamses is far from idyllic. Andrew's parents bicker constantly, with the mother assuming an increasingly aggressive position. A birthday party explodes into chaos as a minor mishap provokes an hysterical argument (suggesting the instability of the household), which Andrew observes with a quiet, unperturbed manner. In one inspired sequence, *La Loggia* depicts the deterioration of the Williams household through a series of dissolves showing the house and yard gradually falling into disrepair, a metonymic image for the breakdown taking place within. Mr. Williams comes to believe that Andrew is a demon responsible for the family's misfortune. Eventually Andrew is revealed to be the reincarnation of Bonnamo, or rather Satan himself, and the Biblical cataclysm occurs, where Andrew/Satan is confronted by the messengers of God and the seeming end of the world--displayed through a 2001-like kaleidoscope of light--is effectuated.

What would otherwise be a reworking of The Omen and its sequels is given considerable depth by a number of significant inflections drawn from both contemporary social/political ideas and reinterpretations of Biblical history, giving ideological analysis a mythical dimension. Andrew's basic innocence is complemented by his gradual and painful realization of his demonic power. Andrew's self-discovery is equated with more contemporary studies of the life of Christ that suggest Christ's own self-realization as an intellectual process that evolved with maturity.⁵³ Viewed

⁵³This topic has been a source of considerable debate in the field of Christology, and the debate itself has had some impact on the role of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of theological questions. Representative works dealing with Christ's self-consciousness are Karl Adam,

from this perspective Andrew is one of the few real anti-Christ's of fiction. His story is a mirror opposite to Christ's, with many identical features. Andrew is a scholarly boy outshining his classmates and somewhat astounding his teachers (paralleling the story of the child Christ visiting the temple); he tries to be a pacifying influence but is most often scorned by his peers and abused by his family, although doted over and protected by his mother. He arrives at a point where his self-discovery is complete and he leaves home to begin his "mission," which culminates in the apocalypse.

The close similarities to the life of Christ are not for mere mechanical comparison nor to show a close attendance to Biblical narrative. The film admits to demonism as a supernatural force (making it fit within the mainstream of the horror film and the trend started by The Exorcist) while simultaneously offering a social-political explanation not only for Andrew/Satan but, tangentially, for the story of Christ.

Andrew's birth in 1963 is a very deliberate narrative statement. The contexting of Andrew's birth in the year of the John Kennedy assassination and the start of a perceived decline of America seems comparable to Ira Levin's contexting of Rosemary's Baby. The contexting becomes richer in meaning as the early time of innocence disappears within the increased cynicism and nihilism of the late 1970s, which is the context of the bulk of Andrew's story. Andrew reaches maturity in the era of punk rock; music by Talking Heads, the Ramones, and the Sex Pistols is juxtaposed on the

The Christ of Faith: The Christology of the Church (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), and Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Vintage Books, 1981). See also Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

soundtrack against a symphonic score, underlining the conflict between humanism and a new barbarism. The Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." blares on a kid's car radio in the high school parking lot as Andrew appears on a fire escape, the song becoming a fanfare for Satan. The solitary Andrew acts as if he is lord over the contemporary scene, the drug-taking and casual sex of his generation, along with the outright savagery of youth culture represented in the bully Tony. Andrew's demonic power increases with his alienation from his peers and his constant victimization--the most notable scene is during a basketball game when Andrew murders a student with a blast of psychic energy powering a ball. Andrew is unnerved by this power, unable to see it as the culmination of his torment. The students torment Andrew primarily because he is effeminate, which Andrew throws back on them during the cataclysmic finale when he becomes androgynous as he reaches the height of his supernatural power. Andrew eventually punishes Tony by making him grow breasts; violence is also enacted against other teenagers who delight in using sexuality as a weapon. Unlike Carrie White in Carrie, Andrew, since he is Satan, is shown to be a logical conclusion to rather than a reaction against human nature.

By making Andrew a noble and introspective figure the film makes the equation with Christ (Andrew is also "Son of Man") but also partially demystifies demonism. Andrew is the most normal of boys, but his existence merely alludes to the tendency to accept everyday life as fundamentally "normal," with crises seen as aberrant or demonic, having no causal link to everyday experience or historical processes. This reading is supported by evidence showing a traditional circumstance of apocalypse-as-projection. The film invites us to interpret the breakdown of the Williams household as caused by a dull, ineffectual man provoking an increasingly

hysterical woman; psychoanalysis would perceive the suggestions of Andrew's bisexuality as the result of his father's withdrawal. Although Andrew surveys the domestic scene knowingly (with the devil's wisdom), a compatible reading underscores Andrew's bewilderment at the hell his parents create for themselves. Mr. Williams cries over a beer at a local bar, telling his friends "My son is the devil." One of the men replies: "I know just what you mean," revealing the crisis to be widespread.

The "normality" of Andrew is further amplified when we consider the incident involving Father Damon in the prologue. Bonnamo, the demon pursued by the priest, resembles Christopher Lee's incarnations of Dracula. Like Dracula, Bonnamo is an Old World aristocrat, and, more explicitly, a landowner and slaver. Like Bonnamo, Andrew is a cultured young man, a representative of the distinguished standards of European civilization. When Andrew takes on Bonnamo's role he too becomes an aristocrat and reveals the devil's power as imperial. Andrew's bisexual characteristics are then equated with the decadence of the ruling class rather than social progress, suggesting that the counterculture of Andrew's world is co-opted, creating an authoritarian order referring to an earlier age.

A "secular" reading of Fear No Evil is enhanced by the story of Margaret, the elderly sister of Father Damon, and Julie, one of Andrew's young classmates. Margaret and Julie are incarnations of archangels Mikhail and Gabrielle respectively. Margaret, who lives a hermit-like existence in full knowledge of her mission as she awaits the battle with Satan, becomes the kindly mentor to Julie, who is tormented by her anagnorisis in the same manner as Andrew. The Margaret-Julie relationship inflects the role traditionally assigned in fiction to the older male professional who

transmits skill and confidence to a young disciple (e.g., The Tin Star, Sanjuro, etc.). At one level the film depicts the need for the female principle to triumph over the barbarism of the order represented by Andrew. There is added complexity here since both Margaret and Julie are in various ways set apart from the community; their saintly roles are equated with the persecution of people alienated due to their revolutionary beliefs or personal lifestyles. The relationship between Margaret and Julie is set against the overt androgyny finally manifest in Andrew. The liberal sexual expression of Andrew's peers is part of the evil element combatted by the Platonic, ethereal relationship of the two women which suggests the necessary sublimation of sexuality. While the relationship of the two women seems revolutionary, it is a reassertion of traditional morés over the degeneracy of youth culture. The most revolutionary element here may be the film's association of unbridled, Dionysian sexuality with the man rather the woman. Andrew's androgyny is followed quickly by his transformation into the Beast. God's power over Satan is translated as the love Margaret and Julie transmit to each other and the loving veneration Margaret has for the sacrifice of her brother Damon, ostracized by the cold and empirical cynicism of his own church. Damon was also denounced because Bonnamo was thought to be a model citizen, the church not wanting to rock the boat with Damon's provocative conspiracy theories and occult fixations.

The bankruptcy of the modern church, juxtaposed with the faith and spirit of love in Margaret and Julie, is revealed when the town stages a Passion Play the same night that Andrew assumes his Satanic incarnation at Bonnamo's estate. The play is a mere spectacle, easily disrupted when Andrew unleashes his curses on the community. Andrew forces real

stigmata on the actor playing the role of Christ, causing a terror in the audience that suggests an instability in the community; the spectacle of Christ's sacrifice has less mythic content now than Satan's pyrotechnics. Satan is vanquished when Mikhail, Gabrielle, and the spirit of Raphael fuse together as one, suggesting the true solidarity of communion found in the origin of religion and culture, an image set against the atomization of the current society.

Fear No Evil reflects remarkably well the tense dialectic at the heart of the demonic possession film, and this dialectic is very basic to the nature of apocalypticism in contemporary film. On one metaphorical level Fear No Evil shows an apocalypse arising out of the decay of bourgeois society. Andrew can be seen as representing the absolute nadir of this situation, with Margaret-Julie suggesting a genuine apocalypse in the collapse of this society and the appearance of a new vision. The apocalypse peculiar to a literary tradition is discovered, however, in the film's attempt to subvert this reading. Andrew and Margaret-Julie are portrayed as unwitting tools to an uncontrollable external force; it is possible to view this force as historical processes which subsume the individual will. In truth, bourgeois society attempts to prevent the individual from perceiving his/her role in historical processes, and to pretend that history is something other than a narrative of the interaction of people. Yet the inevitability of the horror film's apocalypticism is not tied to historical necessity or the inevitability of revolutionary change. Neither are these works involved in an examination of how a society, if able to imbibe successfully a set of spiritual values, will be led to a transcendental New Jerusalem. Fear No Evil is a film more torn than most between the impulse to couch the apocalypse in social/political terms and the tendency to find the crisis in an

external force not involved in individual psychology or social systems.

Here again is the basic strain of apocalypticism inherited from the Puritans that depends on divine intervention rather than human action. The nature of the "sacrificial crisis" exposed by anthropology follows very much the same line of thought. The demonic possession film is probably the most important sub-set within the horror genre in helping to illuminate this crisis. Above all, the demonic possession film reveals apocalypticism's refusal of history, and ultimately, any evidence of human progress. There may be little reason, then, to assume that the renewed pre-eminence of the apocalyptic work signals a time of radical historical change or even a new form of discourse in the work of art.

CHAPTER IV

THE URBAN APOCALYPSE: THE CITY OF MAN AS INNER CIRCLE OF HELL

Chapter II focused on the sense of apocalypse in the horror film emerging out of the disruption of what Richard Slotkin has termed "mythogenesis," or the ability of a people to interpret experience through inherited or renovated myth. Films such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre depict a comic but terrifying explosion of the myth of the frontier, expansionism, the conquest of nature and the formation of the new society. By using so much iconography previously used in American art to describe the frontier experience, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and similar works undertake a deconstruction of American myth by exploring the mythic apparatus and suggesting its failure as a means of allowing the individual an interpretation of history.

In Chapter II the writings of Girard, Sagan, and others were referred to in an effort to understand the "sacrificial crisis" appearing in society when myth-making and myth-sustaining processes fall apart, principally through repetition. While the films dealt with admit to the collapse of various components of American myth, they do not suggest a re-evaluation of myth itself. In the discussion that follows the emphasis moves to images in the fantastic cinema connected to a long artistic tradition preceding the mythopoeics of American civilization, but images used by the mythopoeic process to suggest the success or failure of civilization and its sacred "destiny." Also, we find in the films of urban apocalypse the second part of the thesis I have elaborated about the principal character-

istics of the apocalyptic cinema, specifically, the suggestion that the medium has bankrupted itself of mythic content and can only hold the conventions of genre art up to scrutiny.

Certainly the one figure most heavily laden with concepts about the operation and eventual dissolution of human society is the image of the city. Although Western myth, as embodied in artistic tradition, has given the city numerous positive and negative characteristics, since Romanticism it has become strongly identified with ideas of hell and chaos, a concept reaching fruition first in science-fiction, going through more permutations in the horror film and new hybrids of the fantastique. The city long ago attained its horrific or demonic associations through processes of reversal: for example, St. John's Revelation compares the golden New Jerusalem of Christ with the base forms of human desire represented by Babylon. The positive connotations of the city are more fully developed in St. Augustine, whose City of God has been used by many fiction writers as a model for a temporal Utopia as much as a symbol of the spiritual aspiration of Christianity.

In his contrasts of apocalyptic and demonic imagery, Northrop Frye points out that the city can be viewed either as a symbol of communion, or as a tainted representation of human devices vs. nature, the creation most closely associated with the rule of God.¹ While it is fair to say that Protestant theology is most responsible for the presentation of the city as contaminated instrument of man, suggestions of this theme occur early in epic literature. Frye has referred to the image of the city-hell as a "form that desire rejects,"² a nightmarish opposition to the ordering pro-

¹Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 141-150.

²Ibid., p. 147.

cess of human intervention found in the image of the temple or the earthly kingdom. We find in secular literature a gradual collapse of the ideal of the city as perfected locus of creativity, as an earthly paradise. A precedent is obviously established in Dante, where the City of Dis is a hellscape to be distinguished from the tangled forests of confusion in the natural world. The city Dante describes has become the standardized rendering of the collapse of human enterprise, a place of the "self-imposed confinement of those who stopped up their ears, eyes, noses, minds, in a willful self-exile from the word of God."³

The theologically-based pessimism in the efficacy of human invention, and the need to oppose the baneful iconography of Culture to the untainted Edenic image of Nature, has a long and complex history which becomes pronounced in the nineteenth century. In nineteenth-century literature the city signifies a process of decline. The Romantic poet shows man entering Nature in the hope of achieving a sense of harmony, then establishing a human community within this garden. The Romantic imagination (best exemplified in Blake, particularly with his intellectual ties to Biblical archetypes) sees an inevitable process of decay attached to the establishment of Culture, with the image of the city associated not merely with forms of earthly desire but with the plodding and earth-bound methodologies of rationalism and empiricism that repulsed the idiosyncratic spiritual awakening of the Romantic period.⁴ The city becomes a purely

³A. Bartlett Giamatti, The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 96. Giamatti's study provides an excellent introduction to the image of the city in traditional art and in a poetic tradition with a strong apocalyptic foundation.

⁴I refer here to the Preface to Blake's Milton ("And did these feet in ancient time...") as a key to the apocalyptic sensibility of Romanticism.

evil landscape--"the Paris of Baudelaire, the Petersburg of Dostoevsky, finally the crippling maze which is Joyce's Dublin."⁵ In the plastic arts the paintings of John Martin present the closest visual correlate for the Romantic hellscape; Martin's paintings depict the destruction of the city along apocalyptic lines drawn from Revelation and show the continuity of such ideas with Milton, the foremost apocalypticist of English letters.⁶ Such depictions are even clearer in the work of the American painter Thomas Cole, whose "Course of Empire" series depicts the destruction of empire through the devices of civilization itself, and the eventual overtaking of Culture by Nature.⁷

Much of what I describe here persists in contemporary popular genres because of the pervasiveness of the Romantic temperament in American art, and because the Biblical and classical modes of expression in Romantic art have great pertinence to American experience. The more debased form of this expression has the characteristics of nostalgia and revenge, sentiments not incompatible with apocalypticism as we are discovering it. Nostalgia is evident in the traditional Romantic yearning for a golden epoch that preceded the present decadent era; the sentiment is expressed in the melancholia and wonderment in musing over the ruined fragments of a dead civilization. But Shelley's contemplation of the

⁵Giamatti, The Earthly Paradise, p. 351.

⁶See Marcia R. Pointon, Milton and English Art (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970). See also Christopher Johnstone, John Martin (London: Academy Editions/St. Martin's Press, 1973).

⁷A good discussion of Cole in the American apocalyptic tradition is Elizabeth Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe: An American Imagination (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1979), pp. 53-97. See also Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), pp. 374-377.

Ozymandian ruin is counterbalanced by a coextensive attitude born out of the Romantic experience that the inevitable and fitting consequence of the civilizing process is fragmentation, chaos, and dissolution. Even with those writers who offer some programmatic formulae for the restructuring of society, the tendency to project the destruction of the city as emblem of civilization and banal "profane" concerns remains constant. A rather archetypal instance here is West's The Day of the Locust.

The science-fiction and horror films have a long and convoluted history of describing an apocalypse generated within a hellish city, and it is practical to comment on this history only by way of demonstrating the thematic transitions and current typology of concern here. The Weimar cinema is particularly important in reintroducing the traditional image of the city as Babylon, as a center of human achievement that has caused an affront to divine order. In Metropolis the images of Moloch, the Flood, the Whore of Babylon and the temporary reign of the devil are, of course, wholly dependent on traditional archetypes. In the American cinema, Whale's Frankenstein contains Frye's image of the city on a microcosmic level in the windmill and tower laboratory of the scientist; the destruction of both by fire and the privileged reassertion of Nature are forms of retribution by God over human, secular aspiration.

The science-fiction film and also the "disaster" films of the 1960s and '70s recapitulate both the idea of primordial history returning to devastate accumulated human accomplishment and the essential impermanence of civilization in the face of nature or advanced systems of technology. Examples run from Beast from 20,000 Fathoms to When Worlds Collide to Earth vs. the Flying Saucers.⁸ The "disaster" film (e.g., Earthquake,

⁸There are a number of works dealing with the apocalyptic imagination in science-fiction. A good introduction is David Ketterer, New

The Towering Inferno), essentially a form of melodrama, projects a similar destruction of civilization; in this case there is no metaphysical or super-technological agent; however, the emphasis on destruction as retribution for the sins of mankind has strong traditional ties in the suggestion that humanity must be punished for its arrogance and attempt to aspire to god-like authority. From an ideological standpoint such films represent an attempt to portray the defects of social and political organizations coming to the surface in a holocaust, but with the conclusion that the holocaust, however devastating, will allow the social fabric to remain intact, with basically the same moral and political outlook. In a sense these films are less radical than science-fiction in their attempt to locate societal defects in individual personalities and mismanagement of systems (Towering Inferno), a situation that has a parallel in the popular critique of Watergate. Although the disaster films rely heavily on associations with the myth of Babel, we see that the crisis is never allowed to go so far as to cause the failure of collective beliefs or the destruction of language. In fact, the notion of shared cultural beliefs as a driving force of civilization is presented as a given in these films, with no attempt at a new mode of consciousness or pattern of behavior as an alternative in a post-catastrophe society, thus disqualifying these films for the purposes of examination here. It is obvious that the disaster film inherits the rampant apocalypticism of American art, but it is distant from the dominant current trend of apocalypse in its

Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction and American Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974). See also Vivian Carol Sobchack, The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film (Cranbury, N.J.: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1980). Susan Sontag's essay "The Imagination of Disaster," in Against Interpretation (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1960), is of course important here.

attitude that society and previous belief systems are recuperable.

The iconography of urban apocalypse finds a bridge to the concerns of the contemporary horror/fantastique through some conventions rooted in science-fiction, having a culmination also in some broad cultural fixations. The location of disaster is generally New York or Los Angeles, the contemporary incarnations of New Babylon in popular consciousness with New York generally taking precedence as the modern archetype of Eternal City. The idea of New York as ruined landscape has numerous precedents in science-fiction (Planet of the Apes) and, perhaps more importantly, in a growing trend towards apocalyptic consciousness in mass society. If the current postcard and souvenir industries are indicators, images of the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, the Chrysler building, and the World Trade Center take on new significance in their association with the ruined edifices of antiquity.⁹ Popular art has steadily created a way of perceiving the doomed "destiny" of these structures; this perception removes such buildings from the profane world by giving them a position in history that is at root mystical. The theme in popular art that such mammoth creations are subject to relegation to the force of history suggests a concern both apocalyptic and cyclical. More important, this tendency points toward a massive deconstruction of the myth of the city itself; the individual is no longer awed by the shards of the past, nor does s/he view the prospect of dissolution with the angoisse of the nine-

⁹There are numerous instances of this imagery in contemporary science-fiction, from When Worlds Collide to Beneath the Planet of the Apes. I refer the reader also to the cover of J.G. Ballard, The Drowned World (London: Penguin Books, 1965) for an archetypal example. A post-modern analysis of New York City that relates New York to the histories of the cities of antiquity is in Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air (New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone, 1982), pp. 287-348.

teenth century, since such sentiment presumes a sense of collective myth now disappearing with humanity's new distance from history as a forming process.

The contemporary horror films concerned with urban apocalypse are hybrid works because they continue and inflect upon the theme of the city's collapse as metaphor for human failure. They are hybrid because of their interest in dissecting the conventions of genre cinema in order to project concretely the bankruptcy of various codes and systems of signifying practice, thus suggesting the dissolution of American civilization overall. That a strain of pessimism has existed in mainstream cinema concerned with urban apocalypse has become obvious: The Warriors and Fort Apache: The Bronx are only two of the more recent examples. It is not straining categorical definitions to understand these films as horror films, since they are frequently concerned with the same extreme states of experience and the utter unreclaimability of society we discover in the horror genre. So too are they involved in the idea of the criminal as demon and social problems as supernatural in appearance. They suggest that the urban world, the City of Man, is in a state of total physical collapse, complemented by the moral bankruptcy of its inhabitants and rulers. Fort Apache, in its citation of John Ford, immediately draws attention to the failure of the civilizing process as the imposing vistas of Monument Valley are transmogrified into the mountainous trash heaps, rubble, and abandoned tenements of the South Bronx.

What unites the urban apocalypse of the new wave of the fantastique is its continued deconstruction of American myth and artistic convention, but with a predisposition toward psychological insight we associate with the horror film. The films of the urban apocalypse can be

called "deconstructivist" not only for the ways that they concentrate on the myth-making apparatus of genre cinema, but for the way that they suggest the vision of society supported by popular art is now dead. Such films deliberately undertake the destruction of myth by making us conscious of myth as pure narrative. This debunking process, lacking as it does any ideological base in attacking assumptions perpetuated by art, shares with the new wave/punk phenomenon a sense of revelry in the face of inevitable defeat. (It is not surprising that new wave/punk sensibility and imagery are so visible in these films.) Some directors (Carpenter) tend to revel in a sense of pessimism while others (Romero) approach a thesis within their nihilism that has a small foundation in ideological assumptions. In what immediately follows our concern must be to understand the urban apocalypse vis-à-vis a negative interpretation of tradition and artistic representation.

II

Two films by John Carpenter, Assault on Precinct 13 (1976) and Escape from New York (1981), form a representative example of the debunking of myth and the extraordinary pessimism evidenced in this new breed of "city film." One can propose that they be read with a similar attention to a reflexive study of the breakdown of cultural myth we have discovered in the films of Hooper, Cronenberg, and others. Assault on Precinct 13, a work that did much to establish Carpenter's reputation as a genre director, begins developing themes that find fuller expression in Escape from New York, which, although a very different work, brings to the surface the issues of the earlier films in a more self-conscious and critical way. Assault on Precinct 13 has received an insightful discussion

elsewhere,¹⁰ and will be used here principally to illuminate Carpenter's later work.

Certainly Escape from New York and Assault on Precinct 13 are part of a new "cinema of allusion"¹¹ that connects itself very deliberately to the conventions of mainstream cinema, as much to expose and criticize the premises underneath these conventions as to pay homage to older forms. In the instance of Carpenter there appears a narrow fixation on the traditions of American genre movies to the exclusion of other developments in culture, which seems a rather shallow and reactionary orientation to one's art until we appreciate these allusions as (a) an attempt to deconstruct convention and (b) a representation, from a broad structural perspective, of a sense that the "golden age" of American popular art and the optimism associated with it are now relegated to the past. It should be emphasized that by "deconstruction" we do not refer specifically to the critical thought associated with Derrida, but to a general process of exposing and dissecting myths and the artistic conventions supporting them. The tendency toward "trashing" themes and conventions of genre art is compatible with the punk/new wave movement's inclination toward a sometimes ideological (frequently anarchical) assault on popular music, the industry supporting mass culture, and the ideological suppositions within both.

The hybrid nature of Escape from New York must be understood through the process of deconstruction its themes undertake. Certainly

¹⁰Tony Williams, "Assault on Precinct 13: The Mechanics of Repression," in Andrew Britton, et al., The American Nightmare (Toronto: Festival of Festivals Publications, 1979), p. 67.

¹¹Noel Carroll, "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)," October 20 (Spring 1982):51.

the theme of the film is not immediately recognizable as a continuation of concerns from a particular genre, and must be understood for the way it marshals conventions from horror, science-fiction, and the Western to attack fixations representing the crisis temperament of society. Escape from New York has recycled and refined ideas to make them plausible within the confines of the fantastique, and by virtue of their confinement to genre film, make them palatable by separating them from any immediate political context.

In the year 1997 a non-nuclear world war has occurred that has left the United States economically devastated. The crime rate has risen 400% to a stage where the entire island of Manhattan has been turned into a maximum security penal colony containing several million inmates, sealed off from the outside world except for occasional food-lifts. The U.S. Army has been transformed into a national police force whose sole responsibility is to corral and transport criminals to New York, where they live in a loose tribalistic society. Air Force One is commandeered over Manhattan by the terrorist National People's Liberation Front and the President, who is carrying a formula for a nuclear weapon, is taken prisoner. When the President attempts escape he finds himself stranded in the bedlam of New York, eventually the prisoner of the "street crazies" who inhabit the island. Commander Hawk of the U.S. Police Force recruits Snake Plissken, an incorrigible criminal and a veteran of the "Battle of Leningrad" to enter New York and rescue the President. Plissken does so under duress-- Police Force technicians implant explosive devices under his skin set to detonate unless he returns with the President in a specified time. As a veteran-turned-psychopathic criminal, the Plissken character introduces to the genre the popular mythology about the Vietnam veteran, in itself a

deconstruction of American myths about the regenerative function of war which feed into the "rescue" motif of this film.

A number of elements of past and present American myth are identifiable here, along with an attempt at disassemblage of these myths. In the U.S. Capitol there is a famous statue by Horatio Greenough of Daniel Boone rescuing a pioneer woman and her child from an Indian. Richard Slotkin¹² points out that in this statue proportion is extremely significant, with the figure of the Indian dwarfing the woman and child, and Boone towering over the entire tableau. Boone's size, of course, refers to his heroism, but also to his distance from the virtues embodied in the pioneer family and the foreboding darkness represented by the Indian.¹³ Boone's heroism makes him a solitary figure, a "loner" whose situation has long since created a particular niche in the American mythic pantheon. A comment on the "rescue motif" and the sense of the hero in American art are relevant to a discussion of Escape from New York for the converse cynical reworking of these themes.

As portrayed by Kurt Russell, Snake Plissken is a combination of a number of characters of American popular art, and his relationship to Commander Hawk is central to establishing the premises of the film. Russell's performance is heavily modelled on the characters created by Clint Eastwood for his films under Sergio Leone and Don Siegel; the Eastwood imitation is complemented by the presence of Lee Van Cleef as Hawk, the actor recognizable from the Leone films and a host of genre works of the '50s and '60s. The amoral pragmatism always implicit in the

¹²Richard Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), pp. 440-41.

¹³Ibid., p. 441.

Eastwood character is further reified in Plissken, a criminal in open opposition to the established order. A further amalgamation of character elements is discovered in Plissken's identification with the snake, which associates him not so much with a slippery, conniving operator as with a number of pop culture figures of the '50s and '60s whose sexuality and menace were frequently exteriorized in the image of the snake. One can refer to Brando's realization of Tennessee Williams's Val Xavier, to Jim Morrison (for whom snakeskin was a large part of his personal Freudian / mythic identity), and to a line of erotic/charismatic stars beginning with Elvis Presley (portrayed by Kurt Russell in a TV movie directed by Carpenter). Snake Plissken has a snake tattoo spiralling onto his torso from his lower abdomen; his possession of the phallus is quite negligible since he is a ward of the state whose nascent sociopathology is always in evidence. Plissken's leather flak vest, camouflage trousers and Ingram 9mm machine pistol bypass emblems of Vietnam to quote the "survivalist" gear of particular alarmist vigilante circles developing in the social and economic dis-ease of the '70s and '80s. So too Hawk's United States Police Force refers to the militarization of police into S.W.A.T. teams and the rise of paramilitary organizations that replace traditional institutions of the past society.

The iconography of this film must be viewed against its sense of catastrophe, and the rescue theme also must be illuminated within this context. A war with an opposing power bloc is underway so in a sense the situation of the film does not quite resemble the "after-apocalypse" theme of, say, Corman's Day the World Ended. Carpenter's film contains the theme of impending crisis in the President's need to reach a Russian peace conference with information on a nuclear weapon that will, unexplainably,

bring hostilities to an end, an act that Plissken actually sabotages at the last instant. Clearly the survival of civilization is not the central issue of the film. Rather, we are once again fixed on the immanence of apocalypticism and its aspect as wish-fulfillment. Aside from aestheticizing decay and the failure of cultural beliefs represented in the shards of New York City, the film shares the inclination of dominant ideology for covering up ideological concerns by associating current crisis with situations of past history (Rome), but in a totally aesthetic rather than historical/critical manner.

Our first view of New York is via computer graphics which outline its dimensions, the security procedures used to contain its criminals (a wall separates it from New Jersey, which is still a hold-out of Edenic myth), the surveillance technology needed for maintenance of the project, and the total inaccessibility of the island except for authorized personnel, turning New York into a cybernetic-era Panopticon. The darkened New York skyline we first glimpse is overtly synthetic; our acceptance of New York City as an object is associated with a similar vicarious pleasure the spectator enjoys in the image of the city reduced in postcard art and tourist souvenirs. The idea of the pervasive gaze over a manageable and manipulable object, like a child's gaze over a toy Fort Apache, suggests a distance from a palpable social crisis and an inordinate sense of power and abstraction from the situation.¹⁴

The object-status (fetishization) of New York is further amplified by the criminal population into which Plissken enters. They are "crazies"

¹⁴Michael Foucault's structural analysis of the relationship of the gaze to the idea of power is important. See Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

and are identifiable only by the particular forms of tribalism to which they have reverted. The association of criminality with psychopathology and the amorphous blurring of both into a status divorcing crime from political reality has a long history in the TV police show and the crime film. It is not ironic that two gangs of crazies are identifiable as Indians and Gypsies, groups long identified with demonic forces of consciousness assaulting the civilizing process.¹⁵ So too the group responsible for kidnapping the President (the National People's Liberation Front) is a casual representation of the various atomized (and ideologically dubious) splinter factions that achieved notoriety in the '60s and '70s; the political aspect of all of this is again transmuted into the apocalyptic, with the aggressor representing the demon whose function is to do little more than embody the fears and inadequacies of the operative system, a factor that the protagonist Plissken seems to apprehend. In total, Escape from New York can still be seen as a more radical film than Assault on Precinct 13, where the invading revolutionary forces are associated with a gang ("Street Thunder") and with the amorphous avenging Furies of The Birds and Night of the Living Dead.¹⁶ While similar characterization holds sway here, a specific political view is given force through the inversion of American myth in the image of the hero and the "rescue" theme.

Snake Plissken's journey into New York refers to the archetypal journey of the hero into the Wasteland in search of the person or thing whose attainment (or destruction) will ensure the revivification of the land. That the President must not be killed by the street crazies (since he

¹⁵Slotkin's work is important here.

¹⁶Tony Williams makes a similar connection in his essay on Assault on Precinct 13 cited above.

possesses nuclear secrets that may save humanity) has a playful association with the myth of Frazer's sickly king, who must not be allowed to die a natural death that will signal the collapse of the kingdom; his power must be transformed into a more vital successor. President Harker (Donald Pleasance) is an impotent and ineffectual fence-straddler (referred to as "Mouse"), a figure who recurs in genre cinema as an inverse projection of feelings about American politicians since the death of Kennedy. Similar images have occurred in numerous films, beginning with President Merkin Muffley in Dr. Strangelove. When Harker is captured by the Duke of New York (a hyperbolic extension of the black pimp always seen as the true ruler of the New York City subculture) he is dressed in a woman's wig, underscoring his passive position in the traditional rescue motif of the film. Only when Harker is allowed to escape over the 59th Street Bridge does he assume an aggressive posture by turning Plissken's machine gun on his former captors, establishing the politician's contempt and resentment toward a constituency to which he is "captive" but which he does not represent.¹⁷ In fact, Harker's seeming lack of any constituency and his attainment of office by default sets up a situation of contradiction close in spirit to Apocalypse Now, further emphasized by Plissken's actions at the climax, when he exchanges the tape of nuclear secrets for a cab driver's recording of the "American Bandstand" theme.

¹⁷It is difficult to separate the new image of the politician (represented so well in this scene) from modern political theory of transnational corporatism that doubts the "governability" or "viability" of democracy. See Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 115, 161, *passim*. See also Zbigniew Brzezinski, Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era (New York: Viking Press, 1970), pp. 248-265, *passim*.

The American adventurer journeying into the wilderness on a rescue mission has traditionally had the attributes of the Romantic, certainly in the tales of Daniel Boone by Daniel Bryan¹⁸ and the traditional historiography of the last century; "The landscape, in Romantic manner, reflects the turmoil of the hero's soul."¹⁹ The criminality and psychopathology of Plissken, and the willingness of the power structure to see these as components of his professionalism, make for an interesting reading of the hero's relationship to the landscape. New York is a City of the Dead or infernal maze; it can be traversed now with the assistance of the advanced technology of the power structure. Its association with the cities of tradition and popular art is evidenced in the physical stratification of the city; the most sub-human elements reside underground in the manner of Wells's Morlocks--they interrupt a brief encounter between Plissken and a female inmate by bursting through the floor of a Chock Full O' Nuts restaurant to drag her into their lair inside the earth. Plissken's journey through various strata of this hell recalls Dante, but more particularly Fellini Satyricon in the episodic encounters with the various picaresque or terrifying inhabitants of the inferno. Manifestations of punk and paramilitary, extralegal culture abound in the film. The toady named Romero (a joking homage to one of Carpenter's rivals) refers explicitly to punk society (via Elsa Lanchester in The Bride of Frankenstein).

If the refuse of this landscape hypostatizes aspects of the protagonist's character it is to suggest how a fragmented, junked (or junk) culture creates a schizophrenia in the consciousness of the individual.

¹⁸Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence, pp. 348-354.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 350.

The "Eastwood-Van Cleef" construct suggests that the revisionist Western had much more to do with devitalizing American myths than inflecting them or creating an insightful sub-genre. The idea of progress implicit in the myth of the West is capsulized here in the characters of Brain and his gun moll Maggie, who control an oil refinery situated in the remains of the New York Public Library. Carpenter shows that technology has had little positive effect in advancing the civilizing process, since Brain, a wizened although calculating bookworm, must contend with the physically superior and "street wise" Duke of New York, ruler of the Wasteland. The problem implicit to Snake's "journey" is his inability to locate the center of power that must be replenished. Surely the text of the film diverges from traditional myth in its premise that the controlling force of society is not only elusive, it represents no sense of cohesion and is at last subject for derision. The title of the film itself reflects a broad meta-cinematic comment, in that escape, rather than rescue, signifies the controlling sentiment of urban dwellers who recognize a similar state of entrapment by unrecognizable, unnamed forces.

As in Assault on Precinct 13 (and in his more recent The Thing), Carpenter deliberately skirts issues of causality, especially political causality. This cannot be attributed to the sense of "cosmic upheaval" found in Hooper or certain of the demonic possession films, since at least a few of Carpenter's films have texts intricately and consciously involved in social/political questions. Carpenter's quotations of Hawks, Ford, Leone, and Peckinpah in Assault on Precinct 13 may be involved in disassembling the codes of the Western by devalorizing the hero and anti-hero and showing the rule of a bleak fatalism over the hero's contract with destiny, but his refusal of ideological questions shows the preference for

an apocalyptic over an historical consciousness. The gang called Street Thunder in Assault, although identified as a terrorist faction (one member sports a Ché-style beret) is conceived like the National People's Liberation Front in Escape as a demonic force. A specific ideological base is missing from both groups, who are bent solely on wreaking havoc on civilization. Carpenter does not even go so far as to suggest such groups have a counter-revolutionary rather than radical function in Western society (an argument frequently levelled at such groups as the SLA or Baader-Meinhof). In both of Carpenter's "city films" violence is brutal, arbitrary, and capricious, exemplified best by the cold-blooded murder of the little Lawson girl (driving her father into a catatonic state) in Assault, and the savagery of the underground crazies in Escape, including the Clockwork Orange-style beating of an old drunk (mistakenly identified by Plissken as the President).

An ideological critique of Carpenter must again take into account the attempt to overturn American myth and the rules of the genre. The evidence of Escape from New York suggests that a process of debunking genres has turned into an awareness that the vitality needed for myth to infuse art with meaning has dissipated; the apocalyptic spirit will recognize a reworking of myths only when they are inverted to show the doomed nature of history. Snake Plissken, the composite of the gunfighter-soldier-detective-adventurer of popular art, has returned to the urban caverns Brooks Adams would speculate on as the final repository of the "horizontal energies" of the civilizing experience.²⁰ The irredeemable nature of the city is portrayed as the consequence of the betrayal of the

²⁰I have referred earlier to Brooks Adams, The Law of Civilization and Decay (1924; reprint ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1959).

initial Edenic vision. The "blurring" effect that takes place within the film's text is characteristic of the apocalyptic spirit generally in pointing at undifferentiation as earmark of collapse. An example is the character of Plissken--not just his hero-villain status but the sense that he represents the accumulated evil of civilization. The evocation of Clint Eastwood is fitting in the attempt to focus attention on the lionization of the anti-hero and the situation of this process in an ideological context. The notion of usurpation of authority by the police and the dissolution of distinctions between government and the military (setting up the "who's in charge here?" quandary) also point to the atmosphere of undifferentiation.²¹

The apocalypticism of that form of the fantastique represented in Escape from New York takes its characteristics from its style. As a cinema of "allusionism" it represents an exhausted world of ideas. By calling attention to the nature of myth, it creates the cultural crisis of removing from myth an aura of sanctity and collective belief. We come to understand how the film of "urban apocalypse," by its configuration, is involved in moralizing about a recognizable contemporary state of affairs in which the spectator is immersed. By upsetting the "rescue" and "journey" themes of tradition, Escape from New York makes more tangible the disappearance of myths associated with regenerative function. The implications that the "sickly king" (President Harker) is better off dead and that the hero cavalierly opts for more destruction projects the feeling that apocalypse is a process of wiping the slate clean. The difficulty with this film is that the apocalyptic crisis it portrays is by nature irrational;

²¹The concept has pertinence to the notion of undifferentiation developed in René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 49-51, *passim*.

the motifs of the urban apocalypse, with an amorphous cavalcade of grotesquerie and atrocity (structurally but not philosophically dependent on Dante), defies rational analysis of crisis. The image of the city as the central figure of apocalypse, with its tradition of representing the worthlessness of human devices and organization, provides a convenient subversion of any attempt at critical discourse as to the cause of upheaval. The malevolent spirit of Carpenter's film is not directly attributable to a supernatural force. Quite the contrary, since Escape from New York draws criticism directly to social and political institutions. On the other hand, the supernatural is relied upon, since the final criticism offered is that evil is inherent to society, and that the decay now in evidence cannot be reversed.

III

The "Mad Max" films of Australian director George Miller, Mad Max (1979) and The Road Warrior (1981), are involved in a similar process of enveloping the apocalypse contained in the films' narratives around an examination not only of the death of myth, but of the way mythic ideas are conveyed in contemporary art. Miller's films are especially shrewd in their attempts to explode the conventions of genre cinema as a key to exposing the spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy of the modern landscape. They are truly works of the fantastique not only in obvious uses of conventions from both horror and science-fiction (and, once again, the Western), but in their sense of the "uncanny" as a traditional means of engaging the audience.²²

²²Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 44-46. Todorov makes an interesting application of Freud's concept of the "Uncanny" to fantastic literature.

Mad Max uses as its main premise the post-apocalyptic situation familiar to us from '50s science-fiction. This statement is not quite accurate, however, since although we understand that a cataclysm has occurred in the world of the film before the narrative gets under way, Miller uses his film (like most of the directors discussed here) to suggest the immanence of the apocalyptic spirit. Like Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange, Mad Max uses the fantastique for its prophetic purpose: to extrapolate in order to comment on a contemporary crisis. Mad Max and its sequel The Road Warrior (known outside the U.S. simply as Mad Max 2) are very interdependent works; it is in The Road Warrior that Miller shows greater confidence as an artist and is able to flesh out the ideas of his first work with detail and cohesion. For this reason The Road Warrior is probably worthier of close attention; however, the world-view of this film must be understood in light of the landscape Miller proposes in Mad Max.

The urban, technological world does not receive full treatment in Miller until The Road Warrior. Mad Max begins with the premise that civilization has failed, and it has failed because of deeply-rooted problems in the organization of society and the character of man. Miller wants to characterize this premise in language and images that will be recognizable to the audience as commonly-held attitudes about the nature of contemporary society. He does this by relying heavily not only on convention and codes of genre cinema, but like Carpenter, on fixations of mass society itself.

By situating the apocalyptic landscape of Mad Max "five years in the future," Miller introduces his key interest in using his work to expose and satirize the mass society of the present. In Mad Max a nuclear war

appears to have taken place. The activity of society now revolves chiefly around warfare on the debris-strewn desert highways between gangs of outlaw scavengers and the Main Force Patrol, known because of their badges simply as The Bronze. Max Rockatansky and his partner Jim Goose are two young officers of The Bronze, who patrol the highways in super-charged V-8 Interceptors, their principal adversaries a criminal called Nightrider and his outlaw pack. Significantly, the outlaws are motorcyclists, referring to a long history in genre film of this group as the last rebel faction opposing middle-class complacency, from films like The Wild One through to The Wild Angels, Born Losers, etc. So too the opposition of The Bronze to Nightrider's gang suggests the reference to male bonding in the "professional" relationship of the protagonist to his adversary. Both The Bronze and the outlaw bikers are identifiable by their attention to the image of the vehicle; the motorcycle and the hopped-up auto ultimately dissolve culture and anarchy into chaos, referring once again to warring tribes bearing a symbiotic relationship to one another. As a central figure, Max is very crucial. His tight-fitting leather uniform and sullen, brooding manner reveal the identity of the rebel hero of '50s popular art. And the vigilante-style revenge he takes on the murderers of his wife and child connects him to the figure of the lawman as cynical, disaffected pragmatist known from Dirty Harry and much earlier genre films. Such comparisons are not incidental; they are again part of the process of examining mythic crisis by dissecting the codes of art to reveal disintegration and a consequential failure of collective belief. That Mel Gibson, the actor who portrays Max, should be spoken of as a "new Steve McQueen"²³ reveals the reflexivity of Miller's work and the sense of a

²³Practically all of the early reviews of the Mad Max movies in the newsmagazines made such equations. See David Chute, "The Ayatollah of the Moviola," Film Comment (July-August 1982):27.

vacuum in popular culture waiting to be filled by personalities who presumably embody the fantasies and aspirations of the public. This type of reference is rampant in other aspects of Max's character; the sawed-off shotgun he wears as a sidearm recalls characters created for American TV series ("Wanted Dead or Alive" and "The Rebel" are important, but certainly not the only examples) that revived the traditional association of the hero with specialized weaponry, creating a new industry and a mythos for the youth of the past three decades raised on media, and, covertly at least, refers to the limitations of the new hero Miller approaches with a very self-conscious style.

As a reference to the American crime film, the pursuit vehicle is a significant central image. Bullitt and The French Connection, along with the biker movies, expressed the fascination with a highly-refined technology turned loose to give vent to frustration over confinement by law and the urban landscape.²⁴ As the best representative of the "crash-and-burn"²⁵ genre, Miller's work deals with this frustration turned into anarchy, along with the sense that this energy, although unleashed, goes nowhere. The motorcycles and autos of Mad Max, like the van of Sally and friends in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and the trailer of The Hills Have Eyes, signify a technology that has found little use but to be placed on a circular, unproductive course, simply to be used up and destroyed. Mad Max is clear in its equation of the destruction of technology (the auto) with the destruction of people. The two become interchangeable--as broken

²⁴The idea is discussed in Noël Carroll, "Entr'acte, Paris and Dada," Millennium Film Journal 1 (Winter 1977/78):10.

²⁵David Chute has apparently invented the term. See "The Ayatollah of the Moviola," p. 27.

bodies are saved or scrapped by a process of triage, parts of salvaged autos are reassembled into new vehicles in an attempt to keep the self-defeating cycle operating; Max tells his boss he wants to leave the "rat circus" of law-enforcement.

Miller establishes the incipience of the apocalyptic temperament in society early in his film with the death of the gangleader Nightrider, who calls himself a "fuel-injected suicide machine." The early pursuit-and-collision sequence is important in that the dynamism of its editing again blurs distinctions between pursuer and pursued, not to mention passersby who are caught and destroyed in the melee. Nightrider's death so early in the narrative undercuts our expectations of protagonist-antagonist rivalry; the suicidal characteristic of all figures in the film proposes the idea of the need for high drama in a situation of hopeless frustration. The "car culture" of the Western world in particular is viewed as an image of an internal frustration propelling man toward obsessional behavior and, eventually, suicide.²⁶ The automobile debris that forms much of the iconography of Mad Max is both a monument to this identification/fetishism and an attempt to uncover the impulses around the mystique of technology. The assault on human beings cannot be distinguished from the assault on technology. A graphic example is the attack by Toecutter and his gang on a young couple. The attack signifies an atmosphere of undifferentiation central to the theme of chaos. Toecutter's gang sodomizes the young couple and destroys their auto; the destruction of the car is more prolonged than the abuse of the young people, with the implication, of course, that the auto is the remaining symbol of power, mobility,

²⁶An outstanding work of fiction dealing with this in an almost clinical manner is J.G. Ballard, Crash (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1973).

and authority. Beyond this, the violence of Mad Max signifies an assault on nature and the inversion of values. The imagery of random destruction that pervades this film seems to highlight the use of violence in genre cinema overall. An outright criticism of violence is held back, however, substituting instead the conclusion that the destruction of the remains of industrial society is appropriate revenge for the failure of that society.

Homosexuality and bisexuality are never stronger as themes within the apocalypse of modern horror/science-fiction than in Mad Max and The Road Warrior; although some mention has been made of Miller's research into the sadomasochistic gay subculture while conceiving these two projects,²⁷ it is surprising that the issue of homosexuality has not been seen as a major element toward the understanding of these films. While some critics may place Miller within the "reactionary wing" of genre cinema for his focus on this topic, there are numerous reasons to think that the comments here are intelligent. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that both films view gay and punk/new wave subculture as decadent and reactionary elements of post-industrial society (if only because gay and punk imagery are appropriated by both criminals and the police). Gay imagery is also used, rather sarcastically, to address the role of the male in genre art.

The issue of male bonding is of importance to both of Miller's films, and here again is the filmmaker's attempt to involve himself consciously in the traditions of the professionalism of the male group having a long history in genre film (the Western has examples too numerous to

²⁷See Bob Villard, "Road Warriors," Cinefantastique 4 (May/June 1982):6.

cite). It is Miller's effort, albeit slyly, to turn the issue of male bonding and professionalism upside-down as an image of the civilizing force at work. Miller instead displays the bonding of the male group as another component of general alienation, a point made convincing by the devastated civilization of his films.

The warfare of Mad Max is tribal, but it is a conflict basically of male gangs rather than warring clans, again referring to the violence of the motorcycle film, and, perhaps, much larger genres like the war film. Within this violence homosexual signification is fairly overt and with several purposes. Toecutter's sodomy of the young couple represents sexual violence as an assault on nature, a denial of the victim's sexuality and humanity, the denigrating attack that chooses the anus as a symbol of death and void that Sade proposes.²⁸ The bond between Toecutter and his punk protégé Johnny The Boy has the element of subjugation, particularly with Johnny's initiation by incinerating Max's partner Jim Goose. The homosexuality of Toecutter's gang is also involved in questions about the associations of the various factions with "civilization." Toecutter is dressed in primitive garb rather than the black leather of the traditional cycle hoodlum; although he is an obvious psychotic, he shows a snide contempt for the fear and irrationality that have overtaken society. When an old man tells Toecutter "I'll do whatever you say," Toecutter says: "An interesting philosophy." While there are signs of treason within the gang, there is far more disruption within The Bronze, as when Jim Goose arrests Johnny only to see him released. As members of The Bronze, Max and Jim Goose are demoralized, and they have a professionalism and alle-

²⁸The examinations of Sade by Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes, Pierre Klossowski, Simone de Beauvoir, Georges Bataille, and Ihab Hassan are all pertinent here.

giance to the group signified more by matters of style than by belief in any legal code or social principle. The black leather uniforms and souped-up car reflect the cult of style, male beauty, and what is "cool" about the function of the male group discovered in The Wild One. Miller goes so far as to turn the homosexual undercurrent of this element into caricature in Fifi, the bare-chested Marlboro-Man chief of The Bronze. Even with the overt sexuality of the male bond emphasized, Miller shows how usual trends of power continue and are able to co-opt something as ostensibly progressive as gay life; Fifi is unable to help Jim Goose after Johnny's release and The Bronze is no help at all when Max wants to avenge Goose's vicious murder.

Unlike many genre directors, Miller counterbalances the hero's allegiance to the male group with attention to his domestic life. Also unlike many directors (Hawks, Peckinpah, etc.), Miller shows the darker side of "men without women," especially how the often romanticized image of the male group reveals an intrinsically self-destructive, irrational aspect. When Max views the charred remains of Jim Goose he is driven to the brink of madness; he begins a process of descent that brings about the film's most horrific segment. Max's descent is halted only temporarily by an idyll in the country with his wife and son, but Toecutter's gang returns to terrorize the family. At this point the film breaks with realism in the manner of many crime films to show not the collision of a criminal element with society and the forces of justice, but a vendetta between two equal adversaries. Before Max flees to the country with his wife Jessie and their child Sporg, he says he is separated from the outlaw motorcyclists only by his badge. We begin to recognize the cyclists as demons of Max's own mind; Max is shown to be "mad" in the manner of numerous vigilante

heroes of modern genre cinema, whose allegiance to the laws of society and its civilizing properties rapidly disintegrates with a regression to primal savagery brought about by a slowly-evolving distrust and contempt for civilization. While this concept has been ennobled and romanticized in much American cinema, Miller shows it clearly to be an idea in itself savage and delusory. The darker side of the lawman does not finally give rise to a Noble Savage free of the strictures of civilization, but reveals a schizophrenic unsure of himself and unable to reintegrate into society. At the same time Miller suggests that the "Dirty Harry syndrome" is an inevitable consequence of industrial civilization. As Susan Dermody has remarked,²⁹ the location of the story in a post-industrial wasteland signifies the failure of civilization, and the "biker movie" aspect of the narrative eventually spurns the ideal of the "muse of the open road"³⁰ that is part of both genre cinema and the American self-image.

When Max's wife and son are run over by Toecutter's gang we are presented with an image reminiscent of the opening scene of The Wild One (it is difficult not to recall Brando's words: "This is where it started for me, right here on this road"). Toecutter's gang appears in military formation and recedes on the horizon, leaving behind the child's shoe and rubber ball. Jessie's terrified flight from the gang is made all the more real by her accidental dismembering of one of them during an earlier harassment, a scene that also marks the film's real transition into the realm of the horror genre. When Max discovers the bodies of his family and later learns of their deaths in the hospital he is driven over the edge and

²⁹Susan Dermody, "Action and Adventure," in Scott Murray, ed., The New Australian Cinema (London: Elm Tree Books, 1980), p. 92.

³⁰Ibid.

begins the spiral of revenge with which we are familiar from The Searchers to Nevada Smith to Death Wish. Unlike these films, however, the violence does not produce any self-discovery for the hero. Miller deliberately places Max's revenge at the end of the film to associate the hero's descent with the enveloping darkness now overtaking the scrapheap of civilization. Toecutter's cyclists are indeed the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse; the metaphor is succinct since they suggest merely the evil that has been internalized by mankind. Toecutter is crushed by a tractor trailer and Johnny The Boy is incinerated by Max, a scene of reciprocal violence recalling the death of Jim Goose. Max drives away unredeemed, his process of incorporation total.

The Road Warrior picks up many of the elements of Mad Max, and in a way that calls attention to the nature of the genre film even more self-consciously than Miller's first effort. In fact, Miller cleverly ransacks some important American films (especially Shane³¹) to enhance his enterprise of inflecting on genre themes. The film is also more self-conscious in Miller's research of archetypal myth, including Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces,³² to give the film broader poetic resonance. While Campbell may have some relevance to the success of this film (Frazer seems a more recognizable influence--his presence may be due to the popularity of his writings since Apocalypse Now), what is still most obvious here is Miller's cynical humor and unrelieved pessimism. In The Road Warrior Miller's apocalypse refers to a cyclical view of history, with humanity in a transi-

³¹Touched on by numerous critics, including David Chute in "The Ayatollah of the Moviola."

³²Almost every article on The Road Warrior has discussed Miller's interest in Campbell. It seems that The Road Warrior can be further illuminated by Campbell's The Masks of God: Creative Mythology (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), pp. 175-383.

tional phase before the road back to civilization, as opposed to the absolutely bleak cul-de-sac of Mad Max. In The Road Warrior Max assumes the traditional role of the outsider acting as mediating influence (due to his superior resourcefulness) who assists society in reclaiming itself. In keeping with the conventions of the form, Max, like Moses, is not allowed to cross into the promised land to partake of this civilization because of his connection to the old world. This theme of the "regeneration of time,"³³ while it provides for a much less somber ending than in Mad Max, does not mitigate the filmmaker's acid humor and his use of the material as a continuing devastating critique of contemporary society.

The apocalypticism of the film is privileged at the very outset, with a voice-over prologue introducing us to the broken figure of Max on a dust-swept desert road against a burning nuclear sky; the visionary aspect of this scene introduces us to the protagonist much as we are in Apocalypse Now. The image we perceive is fever-dream and hallucination; the apocalypticism is immediately involved in achieving clarity and balance. The prologue is born out of memory. The narrator (whose identity is not revealed until the end of the film) tells us wearily:

My life fades; the vision dims...all that remain are memories.
They take me back...to a time of chaos, ruined dreams, this
wasted land. But most of all I remember Max, the road warrior...

The prologue successfully connects the film to Mad Max in describing the holocaust--centered around a mad scramble for the world's fuel supplies--that preceded Max's entire story. This technological cataclysm tends to place the film within the convention of science-fiction but for several disclaimers. The very notion of the world of the film emerging from processes of memory (at the end we cannot help but think of Borges's "Funes

³³A concept basic to the work of Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 49-73.

the Memorious"), the dolorous, often Mahler-like score by Brian May, the traditional weltschmerz surrounding the losses humanity has suffered and the elliptical nature of the narrative, reiterate a fin de siècle pessimism basic to Miller and to the essentially non-redemptive element of contemporary apocalypticism. The segment in the prologue describing the holocaust is obviously culled from World War II footage and is completely disjunctive with the technological world the narrator describes. Such usage cannot be written off merely as careless exposition. The cycle in time The Road Warrior describes is shown to have some important precedents which much deny the viability of cyclical theories for Occidental man. The collapse of language as a traditional element of apocalypse is portrayed in Keystone Kops-like documentary vignettes of Parliament and the United Nations. ("Their leaders talked and talked...but without fuel they were nothing...they built a house of straw.") The voice-music-image conjugation of the prologue is often remarkable. A speaker is pushed from a balcony in the House of Commons to a repetitive, spiralling movement in May's score; the sense of emerging chaos accelerates with images of street fighting in London, Mexico City, and Algiers.

The image itself is seen as equivalent to the "world" of the past, which gradually dissolves from black-and-white into color, from dream into consciousness. The figure of Max, a bridge between two worlds, slowly emerges. His characteristic as a victim is apparent: "In the maelstrom of decay ordinary men were battered and smashed...men like Max, the warrior Max." Thus Max is presented as a mass man, a typical figure of an older order. Max is an atavism; he appears out of the oneiric imagery as a figure limping away from the crude graves of his wife and child. As the main narrative gets underway, Max's limp (caused by his

final confrontation with Johnny in the earlier film) and his leg brace have significance, particularly as Miller draws on myth for the controlling elements of his story. Max is an archetypal "limping hero"³⁴ of modern fiction, a character partially unmanned by a mysterious wound. The idea of the hero's limp, a concept dependent on tradition, appears in Lawrence, Tennessee Williams, and Nathanael West in characters resigned to take a passive relationship to their circumstances. It is interesting that Peter L. Hays describes Perken, the sexually impotent adventurer of Andre Malraux's The Royal Way, as a "burnt-out shell of a man,"³⁵ precisely the description the narrator gives of Max in the prelude to The Road Warrior. It is most fitting that the adventures of Max should unfold in an "industrial wasteland"³⁶ and that the concept of Wasteland should appear so prominently in the film. The dependence on the model of the sickly king described by Frazer and the narrative of the hero's journey across the Wasteland discussed by Weston are modified here, just as Miller modifies the conventions of genre cinema.

Modernism's reversal of archetypal myth can be seen in the hero's own sterility, his lack of direction, his inability to perform any ritual function for society. It may be said that the mythic structure of the Fisher King narrative is preserved in Max's opposition to Humungus (the "lord of the Wasteland"), but at no time do we get the sense that Humungus was once a noble figure for the community who must now be destroyed to create a new epic moment. We are provided with hints that Humungus, before

³⁴See Peter L. Hays, The Limping Hero: Grotesques in Literature (New York: New York University Press, 1971).

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁶*Ibid.*

becoming ruler of the scavenging hordes who oppose Papagallo's colony, was once an army officer.³⁷ This is evidenced by Humungus's wooden case containing his revolver, military decorations, and old photographs. He was merely a member of an order already extinct before the holocaust began.³⁸

Miller's discussion of the bankruptcy of archetypal myth is coextensive with his toying with the conventions of film. When the Feral Kid first spots Max approaching the compound of the settlers, the scene is a direct lift from Shane, except that the fence railing the Kid stands near is charred. Max is motivated to assist Papagallo and the settlers in their attempt to escape Humungus only by his need of fuel. So too the colony merely uses Max for its own ends, even after his partial profession of faith. Miller reverses the themes of the Western also through the idea that Papagallo's group wants to flee the territory, not cultivate it. And we are not allowed to have any sympathy for Humungus, as George Stevens gave to the character of Riker in Shane. Whereas Riker was the symbol of a step in the civilizing process, Humungus represents the evil culmination of civilization. Miller further overturns genre convention and traditional myth. Papagallo's group retained its humanity and possession of technology in the midst of the cataclysm. Their identity as people of the soil and of a new covenant is seen in their simple dress; at the same time, however, their dress is trés chic (the production unit referred to them as

³⁷Miller created background material on all of his characters, hinted at through small pieces of evidence scattered throughout the film. See Blake Mitchell and Jim Ferguson, "Mad Max II: The Road Warrior," Fantastic Films, No. 30, p. 62.

³⁸The idea of Humungus's relationship to a dead order can be partially explained by Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949; reprint ed., Princeton Paperbacks, 1972), p. 388.

the "Gucci Arabs"³⁹), and the association of their leader's name with an international fashion house has some importance beyond the director's humor. Their vision of the new land, represented in Curmudgeon's postcards of a beach resort and the promise that there will be "nothing to do but lie in the sun and breed" represents the banality of utopian dreams. Furthermore, while the ending suggests a new beginning for the colony, this is a good indication that the new cycle in time will be equivalent to the old. We learn at the end that the Feral Kid was the narrator, that he eventually became "chief of the great Northern Tribe," and that this memory of the past has been his. That the Feral Kid became not only literate but the leader of his society demands the optimism associated with much genre cinema, except that the vision of the past the narrator gives us is filled with longeurs and begins with "my life fades...the vision dims." In most respects the entire film is not about the vision of a new world, but about nostalgia for lost life. It is only after the cataclysm, when culture begins to emerge out of chaos, that any vitality is seen. The violence of the film is certainly a key focus of interest; it is the revitalization process evident in the "primordial chaos" of violence rather than the actual construction of a new society that is important. Culture and anarchy merge in Miller's world-view, and it is clearly the impulse toward the latter that the director sees as the motivating force of society.

Miller seems another director dependent on the influence of William Burroughs for the use of his art as social satire and as projection of an incipient apocalypticism in modern society. There is little question that Miller draws upon pop culture--particularly the punk/new wave phenomenon and the image of gay society exemplified in The Village People--in

³⁹See John Baxter, "Mad Max 2," Starburst, Vol. 4, No. 9, p. 35.

delineating the vision of The Road Warrior. Humungus and his "dogs of war" were in part inspired by Miller's research of gay sadomasochistic magazines.⁴⁰ Like Burroughs, Miller looks to pop culture to understand both the conditioning factors of this culture and evidence of a viable alternative society. Also like Burroughs, Miller creates codes in his own work recognizable to a mass audience as symbols of the formative function popular art has on consciousness. Certainly the names the Feral Kid, Humungus, Warrior Woman, Curmudgeon, the Golden Youth, etc., recall Burroughs's use of detective novels and science-fiction in his writing to draw attention to the fictive imagination. There is a tacit belief in Burroughs and Miller (more overt in Burroughs) that the popular fiction that impacts strongly on youth can ultimately nurture the imagination in its revolt against the old order. Burroughs has suggested the perverse side to the literature of childhood, from Stevenson and Twain to Chester Gould, going so far as to suggest that some of the more dangerous drivel foisted on youth can be successfully imbibed to produce a rationale for violence, for destroying the society that created ethics with this art.⁴¹

Of course Burroughs's moralism has another side. Embracing the more banal or destructive forms of pop culture (or even the untainted visionary literature of childhood) is usually an exclusionary gesture. It is infantile regression, but for Burroughs it is the assertion of the male principle over the female. Burroughs's literature makes us conscious of

⁴⁰A useful political analysis of polysexual sensibility and punk culture is Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (London: Methuen & Co., 1979).

⁴¹A premise discussed in Eric Mottram, William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 82, passim. An early sub-title to Burroughs's Cities of the Red Night was "A Boy's Book."

Tom Sawyer and Dick Tracy as part of a hermetically-sealed male province. The world of men-without-women of male escapist literature is for Burroughs an area of ideological education. Burroughs has tried to project adventure literature as a model for a homosexual utopia, believing that civilization (adulthood) into which the male grows is fundamentally matriarchal rather than patriarchal, tending to use sexuality as a weapon and a divisive element that eventually distills all joy from sexual expression. The gay utopia is a parody and a rejection of the old worlds of myth Eliot mourns in The Waste Land, that Burroughs (and, it would seem, Miller) thinks can be reclaimed only in humorous shadow image. Burroughs has remarked:

Women are trouble. It is another organism with interests perhaps irreconcilable with the male interests--which has installed itself as indispensable.⁴²

Burroughs's interpretation in The Wild Boys of the long-simmering revolt of American youth culture against matriarchy goes against much ideological criticism, but the relevance of Burroughs's literature as an embodiment of an ideal in popular art, one embraced by a large heterosexual audience, cannot be overlooked. The Road Warrior, like The Wild Boys, operates as allegory and as culmination to the ideology of male escapist literature. The world of The Road Warrior is exclusively male, even when occasionally populated with women. The Warrior Woman, the most visible female of the film, is recognizable for the way she adheres to a male code of professionalism. She is at first distrustful of Max and concerned only with the welfare of the compound (she calls Max "mercenary trash"). She has identifiable professional skills (with bow and arrow) similar to those of the men. Her downfall is signaled at exactly the point that she demonstrates tenderness and the possibility of a relationship with Max. When she is

⁴²Mottram, William Burroughs, p. 168.

singled out for brutal murder by Wez it is at least as much because she is a woman as a defender of the tanker-truck Max drives (Wez shouts "woman, woman!" as he kills her). The mohawk haircut and punk/sado-masochistic gear of Humungus's army of rabble constantly refer to the gay underworld that has regularly appeared below the surface of the popular literature alluded to earlier. The first relationship of which we are aware is between the maniacal Wez and his lover/sidekick the Golden Youth. One of the first acts of violence is their murder of a heterosexual couple attempting to flee the compound. Wez demands revenge on the compound after the murder of the Golden Youth by the Feral Kid, a quirky inflection of revenge motifs; Wez must be restrained physically by Humungus, who later puts Wez on a leash. Wez's character is crucial to the perverse spirit of the film. His berserk vendetta against Max is triggered after Wez's early humiliation in front of his young femme lover the Golden Youth. The Wez-Max contest is both a struggle of two equal professionals (cf. The Tall T) and a homoerotic contest. Miller, the former scientist, cleverly tries for a presentation of action as libidinally motivated.

The "boys' adventure" aspect of The Road Warrior looks much more askance at the idea of alternative societies than the work of Burroughs. Miller suggests an apocalypticism both to the feminist movement, punk/new wave/gay culture, as well as dominant ideology. The subject of power as a continuing game is central to Miller--witness the marauders' endlessly circling the compound, ("going 'round and 'round" in the words of the Gyro Captain), attempting to pose a threat only to burn up gasoline; also important is Wez's ceremonial "rain dance" and crucifixion of the compound captives. Ceremony is reduced to gratuitous spectacle; the foreboding aspect of the marauders' primitivism is diluted by the humor that refuses

belief in "magic." We understand early in the film that the impulses behind technological expansion can only be destructive, so the struggle of the compound people must be seen as ultimately pointless. But Miller's statements about a technological future are not nearly as important as his deconstruction of accepted notions of myth and popular culture. The wounded Max--this otherwise virile culmination to the rebel hero of the '50s and '60s--must be seen as an indication of Miller's belief in the paucity of myth in popular art. The fable of the Wasteland is enacted in some detail, but its deliberate presentation as myth is to rob it of any magical or ritual value. Miller's cynicism extends to his depiction of alternative societies, e.g. punk/new wave, as emblems of the loss of myth. The barbaric tribalism of Humungus's marauders retains recognizable structures of power, a situation Miller tends to ascribe to the current predicament of society. Papagallo tells Max: "You belong out there...with the garbage"; Max is associated with the culture of the marauders (certainly his style of dress lends to the association) but he is of obvious worth to the compound. The last irony comes when the manic Gyro Captain becomes the new leader of the colonists, suggesting that the downward spiral of civilization has already begun again. Miller seems to be suggesting that the heroes of popular art and the culture that produced them may be crippled, certainly by the exposure of the mythic apparatus underneath the conventions of this art, but there is as yet little on the horizon to fill the void.

We see in the Mad Max films a dependence on a cyclical view of history that has less to do with an attention to anthropology or history itself than to a traditional faith and spirit of optimism nurtured by popular art. By acting as a capsulization of so many tendencies in genre cinema, Miller's films are able to play on the expectations of the audience, and

continually subvert these expectations. The Mad Max films operate well as a culmination to the "urban apocalypse" sub-genre for their use of the post-industrial landscape primarily as a backdrop for narratives that show cataclysm to be something endemic to a view of reality conditioned by popular art. Whereas films like Fort Apache: The Bronx and Wolfen are either deliberately vague about the pervasiveness of evil or offer sociological sops about the inadequacies of economic systems, Miller's acerbic wit is much more radical, even as it does not contain precise ideological statements. Miller draws our attention to some of the underlying silliness and banality of popular fiction and how it can easily transmogrify vital aspects of myth. While using a free hand in playing with and exposing genre conventions, he demonstrates the popular acceptance of the most deconstructed myths and conventions of art. Max is a renovated and pale version of Shane, and the sense of urgency for repetitions of myths becoming more remote from experience suggests the strongest statement about the currency of apocalypticism in art and society. The sentiments of nostalgia and revenge pertaining to the urban apocalypse of traditional art have relevance to the vision of Mad Max and The Road Warrior. These films support the sense of lost faith in collective myth, simultaneous with a cry for violence as expression of a far more profound feeling of distrust of a mythic past but also a resentment at being cut off from a period when belief in myth provided cohesion to civilization.

IV

The poster art to George Romero's Dawn of the Dead shows the scarred head of a zombie rising from the edge of the horizon with the words "When there is no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth."

The phrase is a kind of epigraph for Romero's breakthrough works of the genre in its apocalyptic extension of Goya's "The sleep of reason produces demons." The idea of a demonic agent referred to in Chapter III is in some respects operative here, in that a heteronomic spirit is controlling the activity of the narrative but acting in fact as an emblem of a deeply-rooted ailment in the organism (society).

The Romero zombie films are conscious, if caricatured, recreations of the urban apocalypse of tradition; they depict the image of this apocalypse figured in the plastic arts from Bosch and Brueghel to Goya, Doré and John Martin.⁴³ Romero himself has defined the zombie films as about "what happens when a revolutionary society with a totally new structure deposes an operative societal structure."⁴⁴ On the face of it the apocalypse of Night of the Living Dead (1968) and Dawn of the Dead (1978) seems to have a more dialectical, ideological bent than the urban hells depicted in tradition, despite Romero's frequent citations of this tradition. Romero is another director who has cautiously sidestepped ideological readings of his work, while at the same time making clear that his contribution to the cinema (including his location in Pittsburgh and his attempts to dissociate himself from Hollywood) has been involved in a rejection of dominant culture and the film industry.⁴⁵ A more dramatic statement Romero has made in this regard that brings into question his ideological position is his belief that:

⁴³I appreciate Scot W. Holton's notation on this in his liner notes to the Dawn of the Dead soundtrack album, Varese Sarabande (VC 81106).

⁴⁴Romero is quoted by Scot Holton for the notes to the Night of the Living Dead album, Varese Sarabande (STV 81151).

⁴⁵See Romero's essay prefacing John Russo's novelization of Night of the Living Dead (New York: Pocket Books, 1974).

The public, that potential of eyes and ears which is the recipient for the media barrage, is basically one conglomerate which seems to react as a ball of clay. A heavy, concentrated push in one spot on the ball will create a concave depression, but at the same time, on the rear hemisphere, a lump will rise. That lump, in this metaphor, represents the clutching search of the public mass toward something new or as yet unexperienced.

Certain elements of the public will, at certain times under certain circumstances, gravitate a certain way. A worthless truth; worthless until somebody defines the elements, pinpoints the times, outlines the circumstances, and thereby predicts the gravitational flow. But that is a study for philosophers and sociologists, not for the mercenary mogula who have built empires by betting on the same thing.⁴⁶

There is much in Romero's thinking that reveals an ill-defined and uninformed political consciousness, but it appears to be a consciousness imparting heavily on his art and deserves examination.

Romero's thinking seems centered on conceptions of "human nature" and the "mass mind" associated with bourgeois humanism and a reactionary temperament that has assimilated jargon from the social sciences. Romero's sense of the malleability of the masses is based more on a perception of defects within human nature and democratic institutions than on political/economic systems. While Romero rails against mass media and Hollywood moguls for their manipulatory and exploitative impact on society, his alternative is an "independent" system of art production that will somehow exist outside the constraints of ideology. Most of his comments about his films have incorporated his thesis of the need for independent filmmaking cooperatives as an alternative to the industry, an idea that gained prominence in the late '60s. In fact, Romero geared the often shocking, "exploitative" violence of his early work toward a critique of the industry which, amidst its turmoil in the wake of the video revolution,

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 5-6.

relied on the most thinly-veiled sensationalism to draw a new audience.⁴⁷ This somewhat self-reflexive attitude toward art and the perceived need for utopian/socialist institutions reflects Romero's critical and visionary side, but if we are to judge by the product of his art (Romero has no real theoretical papers), his true program is anarchical and nihilistic. His "living dead" films, for all their critical aspects, rely on the traditional vision of the urban apocalypse decrying all human enterprise as futile.

In Dawn of the Dead there is in particular an apocalyptic temperament kindred to Sade in the concentration on the accretion of satisfactions developing into a void;⁴⁸ like Sade, Romero's moralism draws on the logic and conventions of prevailing systems, including prevailing intellectual trends and notions of alternative societies. Also like Sade, Romero intuits a suicidal, auto-cannibalistic aspect to the forces that presume to give organization to society. But Romero is not engaged in any titanic struggle against God and Nature that will forestall acceptance of the void or justify the pre-eminence of the individual will. Rather, Romero's apocalypse can be understood with reference to the visions of Huxley, Orwell, and behavioral psychology that have found their way into popular discourse. The hand that is rapidly conditioning and dehumanizing mankind is invisible but omniscient; while the zombies and other demons of Romero's work provide transparent critiques and possible solutions to his crisis, Romero is never concerned with an historical process. His attack on consumerism, the military, the family, and all human relationships may have at base a

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁸Most of the representative essays on Sade touch upon this. See Georges Bataille, Literature and Evil, trans. Alastair Hamilton (New York: Urizen Books, 1973), pp. 83-109.

consistent ideological thesis, and he may have chosen to keep this thesis rather vague for the sake of his films' distribution and wide-scale acceptance by an audience, but there are numerous opportunities in Romero's films when ideological critique is substituted with nihilism.

All of this is not to suggest that Romero's work is hopelessly compromised, nor is it to suggest that our concern here is with "political cinema." Romero is important precisely because his politics are tied to apocalypticism, and because his sense of wiping the slate clean seems to be a good instance of reflecting some dominant currents of mass society. The prolonged violence-as-revelry of his films, like that of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, suggests that teetering on the edge of the void, that participation in the apocalyptic moment, can be prolonged. Romero, far more than Hooper, suggests a process of wish-fulfillment in the apocalypse of his films by removing any mythic framing device and locating the action squarely in contemporary consumer society (especially true in Dawn of the Dead). For all of their references to tradition, Romero's allegories are meant to be read as secular rather than mythic. Although such a reading is undercut in many instances by the evidence at hand, these films in no way concern themselves with the "death of myth," since the very notion of the shared beliefs of the community is held in contempt.

The principal distinctions between Night of the Living Dead and Dawn of the Dead have been made in considerable detail.⁴⁹ Night of the Living Dead may be seen as a preamble to Romero's later work (including his film The Crazies), especially in its simultaneous homage to and rejection

⁴⁹A key essay on Romero is R.H.W. Dillard, "It's Not Like Just a Wind That's Passing Through," in Horror Films (New York: Monarch Books, 1976), p. 55. See also Robin Wood, "Apocalypse Now: Notes on the Living Dead," in Britton, et al., The American Nightmare, p. 91.

of the traditional American horror film. Shot in a murky and foreboding black-and-white, Night of the Living Dead recalls both the major Universal horror films of the 1930s and the low-budget programmers of the '50s. Its breakthrough resides in its deliberate lack of attention to causality--the contaminated Venus probe that returns to earth is a barely adequate explanation for the holocaust, one that is actually disclaimed in the course of the film. Another distinction is in the use of the zombie as a monster only insofar as this monster represents a general spirit of chaos in the community and the instability that resides behind a facade of cohesion.⁵⁰ The zombies could be said to have a "didactic" function since they figure as the logical extension of an auto-cannibalistic middle-class society. While the zombies may have as their single goal the consumption of human flesh, they show a greater sense of community than do Tom, Harry, Ben, and the survivors. The zombies are outright victims at the hands of the sheriff's posse: witness the sheriff's famous "beat 'em or burn 'em--they go up real easy."

While Night of the Living Dead may be seen as Romero's early parable of prevailing xenophobia, paranoia, and hatemongering rampant during the Vietnam era, Dawn of the Dead goes a great deal further as an indictment of American civilization. In Night Romero provides a strong sympathetic figure in the character of Ben, and there is deliberate and tragic irony in his eventual victimization. There is no such figure in Dawn; although Peter, the National Guard trooper who takes command of a survivor party might be compared to Ben (who also happens to be black), his morality is often in question. Nor does Romero give the zombies the uniform characterization here that he did in Night; although the zombies

⁵⁰ An idea basic to the films developed by Wood.

are at first equated with blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other minority groups frequently victimized by society, they are eventually reduced to object status shared by living human beings (and department store mannequins) in suggesting the pervasive lack of consciousness in consumer society.

In Dawn of the Dead Romero exploits fully the image of the plague as a harbinger of apocalypse and uses it to refer to traditional notions of eschatology. The title itself foregrounds Romero's pessimistic irony by the association of epiphany with death. From this invocation Romero proceeds to upset Christian eschatology by tampering with the Christian perception of the plague in the Middle Ages and by referring to religious attitudes that often contradict mainstream Protestant theology; these include voodoo and black fundamentalist religion of the nineteenth century. When Roger and Peter are clearing a tenement dwelling of zombies in the opening massacre they discover an elderly black minister in the smoke-filled basement who tells them "...the dead walk. We must stop killing... or we lose the war..." And later: "The people of 107 will do what you wish now. They are simple people but strong...and they give up their dead to no one!" The old priest is prophet and atavism--the notion of "giving up the dead" refers to the destruction of corpses during earlier plagues, like the yellow fever epidemic in the South during the 1800s. Later on Peter tells Steven his mother's maxim (derived from voodoo) about the dead walking the earth. At the same time the attack by S.W.A.T. and the National Guard on the mostly black and Puerto Rican apartment house is an attack on a social class, especially when the kill-crazy Wooley leads the assault railing against "low-life spics and niggers living in fancy hotels." The decimation of the apartment house clearly has more to do with a justification for wholesale slaughter than with the ridding of the

disease represented by the zombies.

Perhaps this is better understood by realizing that the attack on the apartment signifies the beginning of the film's allegory. When Peter stops the mayhem by executing Wooley he is not engaging in the reciprocal violence of black men against white; he sees Wooley simply as a psychotic who serves as more evidence of social breakdown, disrupting the organization entrusted with maintaining order. We do not even learn Peter's race until later in the narrative (his head is covered with a gas mask). Peter begins to doubt his ability to remain a stabilizing force when he executes a group of zombies in the tenement's basement. We recognize Peter's self-disgust and his recognition of himself as functionary whose job is to cover up an ailment that has long since overwhelmed society. At the end of Night of the Living Dead Ben emerges from a basement to be shot and thrown on a bonfire. Roger and Peter emerge from the basement massacre in Dawn of the Dead to enter the wider hell of the outside world. By using the basement as a symbol of repression Romero suggests that enlightenment, if available, is too late.

The assault on the apartment house, during which the military and paramilitary organizations crumble, is preceded by a scene at WGON-TV, where newswoman Fran Parker witnesses the onset of chaos in mass media. She watches a debate between Dr. Foster, a scientist advocating a "rational" approach to the zombie question, and a local news commentator. Foster's approach of dealing with the zombies as objects and disposing of them in the most expedient manner available is greeted with boos from the studio audience. Eventually Foster becomes outraged and uncontrollable in reaction to the audience's emotionalism. Romero's attack on the media makes for the most forceful instance of Dawn of the Dead as polemic. As a

typical "Action News" operation, WGON-TV is concerned with only the most superficial aspects of information, and as a representative of the media at large, has the ideological function of co-opting and controlling the topics and nature of debate. The scientist's "rational" approach to the zombies lacks any sense of overview, while the predictable emotionalism of the "humanist" audience merely propels the hysteria onward.

The ideological facade that media attempts to create is further seen in the character of Fran Parker. In his novelization of the film Romero goes to some length in establishing Fran as an ex-housewife who

traded in her glasses for contacts, her brown hair for silver blond, and her extra twenty-five pounds of pasta, chocolate cake, and domesticity for a knockout figure.⁵¹

By showing the disintegration of the organized and perpetually calm image projected by TV news, Romero comments also on the emptiness of the "careerism" of a new breed of young professionals. "Our responsibility here has finished" says a newsman as the station crew scatters to escape the plague. Fran must be provoked to leave by her boyfriend Steve; her hesitancy suggests that the continuation of the media image is important in maintaining social stability.

As Steve, Fran, Roger and Peter prepare their escape from the mayhem, the full nature of Romero's allegory begins to reveal itself. As in Night it is the bite of the "living dead" that brings the victim into the realm of the undead; the oral attack has to do with infantile regression while connecting the image to the vampire film. The fact that this regression/insanity is directly tied to the image of plague refers to the notion of rampant disease associated with social chaos found in tradition.

⁵¹George A. Romero and Susanna Sparrow, Dawn of the Dead (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 1.

The appearance of the Black Death signalled for large portions of the population of the Middle Ages a time preceding the Last Judgment;⁵² it provoked wide-scale hysteria and religiously-motivated self-recrimination resulting in the flagellant sects.⁵³ Many of these sects tended to become "rampaging hordes" that struck out at various groups perceived as demons provoking the crisis.⁵⁴ Violence that becomes inwardly-directed and self-perpetuating without any tendency toward insight regarding the cause of social dysfunction is truly suicidal. The tendency to expiate evil by further internalizing it by self-destructive behavior has been analyzed by Freud as evidence of repetition-compulsion, associated with the death instinct.⁵⁵ It is certainly not venturing too far into psychoanalytic territory to apply such a reading to Romero's film. The continued killing of the zombies (in every conceivable fashion) and consumption of commercial goods that take up the bulk of the film can be understood well through the theory of repetition and as the modern resuscitation of the plague, with its associated collective insanity.

In their shopping mall hideout the quartet is able to go hog-wild in a consumer paradise and give vent to the compulsion to own in the same

⁵²An important piece of research on this topic is Robert E. Lerner, "The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities," The American Historical Review 3 (June 1981):533-56.

⁵³See Richard A. Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement of the Mid-Fourteenth Century," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 4 (1974):157-76. The coupling of mania with the plague is compellingly portrayed, of course, in Bergman's The Seventh Seal.

⁵⁴This idea is central to Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

⁵⁵See Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1952).

way that police movies allow the viewer the vicarious thrill of turning loose all the horsepower on city streets, unfettered by traffic laws. Romero's camera takes careful notice of all the particular brand names at the haberdasheries, gourmet shops, drug stores, banks, sporting goods and liquor stores of the mall. A quick montage shows Peter and Steve trying on and practicing with a variety of guns (Derringers, Colt. 45s, .357 Magnums, percussion pistols); some images recall the dynamic openings of TV shows of the 1950s, like "The Rifleman," "Have Gun, Will Travel," and "Wanted: Dead or Alive." For a time Peter, Steve, and Roger make the killing of the zombies and the "shoplifting" of consumer goods a game, as if in vindictive reaction to laws that no longer exist. For a time we see in Peter and Roger the Vietnam War providing its veterans with "professional skills" they can utilize in paramilitary, police, or vigilante units on the home front, a myth popularized in films like The Stone Killer, Rolling Thunder, Taxi Driver, and of course, Escape from New York. One suggestion of these films (including Romero's) is that a force impacting on the soldier who went to Vietnam was the pop culture that nurtured the youth market of the 1950s and gave it a peculiarly abstracted notion of violence. Peter and Roger are veterans, but their skills are exhausted early as there is nothing of interest to defend. Roger becomes overconfident as he sees the zombies as a vulnerable enemy: "We got this thing by the ass." His overconfidence develops into the hysterical ecstasy of sheer bloodshed as he finds ways to kill two, three, four zombies at once. It is at the point when his hysteria is pronounced that he is overwhelmed by a zombie (a demon of his own madness), initiating him eventually into the undead.

What is at stake in the war with the zombies is the preservation of humanity as a rational force. In this film the zombies are not the ordinary

country folk of Night of the Living Dead but are often recognizable as people viewed as less than sentient, including Hare Krishnas and teenagers who presumably used the mall as a hangout. As Steven remarks: "They came back out of instinct...memory of what they used to do...this place was important to them." Romero extends his cynicism to include middle-class society itself as composing the zombie population. Yet warfare between the quartet of survivors and the zombies cannot finally be seen as class warfare; the zombies are indistinguishable from one another as they lie strewn on the mall floor, and the quartet continues the behavior of the once-living "dead" in their "Supermarket Sweep" of the mall stores. The stealing of goods is linked to the killing of the zombies as externalization of resentment; goods are taken from shelves in defiance of security systems, just as zombies are simply pushed aside like ordinary pedestrians who impede one's path. Steve, Roger, Peter, and Fran realize Dr. Foster's belief in the unsentimental disposal of the enemy. They also deny the superficial and false sentiment of the TV studio audience that pretends to affirm its own humanity by refusing the program for extermination of the zombies. Romero reveals the utter atomization of society and the rapid entry of the quartet of young people into this anti-community.

The accretion of pleasures in killing and consuming reaches a vacuum. First Roger is reduced to a helpless child (and then a zombie) wheeled about the mall in a cart after his battle in the parking lot. Peter enters a period of ennui as he plays solo tennis amid a field of dead zombies. The relationship between Steve and Fran deteriorates after their "night out" at a mall restaurant, and there is no hope that the affair can be salvaged since zombies overtake Steve in the last battle. The deteriorating mental state of the four is represented in the surrounding of the

chic "consumer paradise" they build in a niche of the mall barricaded from the zombies. At first composed of trendy and well-arranged furnishings, their living quarters deteriorate to a pile of trash, evident most with the death and grisly "resurrection" of Roger, who remained in a living "human" state with the aid, ironically, of morphine and other drugs taken from the mall pharmacy. Peter's execution of the zombie Roger almost pushes him over the edge, a crisis further aggravated when Peter is also forced to kill Steven and surrender one of his guns to the zombies.

The crisis reaches a peak with the invasion of the cycle gang. The combination of zombies-motorcyclists-S.W.A.T. team survivors creates a comic-grotesque tableau from the comic art of S. Clay Wilson. For the most part the cyclists simply drive in a circle and grab hold of goods solely for the purpose of destruction, again pointing to repetition-compulsion as motivating force. The barbaric cyclists represent the worst possible temptation for Peter and Roger, to which they nearly acquiesce. The cyclists are a paramilitary gang (an "army" according to Peter) whose sole purpose is to "search and destroy"; their looting and killing is done with even more abandon than the quartet's. Peter and Steven find themselves defending their property, and in so doing become a mirror of the gang--they are now part of the innocent and vulnerable zombie culture and are able to recognize their own wanton barbarism in their assault on the zombie's territory.

Romero refuses at any point to sentimentalize death and insists on the zombies as products of the reciprocal, repetitive nature of consumer society. That the dead should "rise" is in humorous defiance of traditional concepts of resurrection and messianic beliefs in a final regeneration of the world. Romero's zombies assault the transcultural faith that:

This eternal repetition of the cosmogonic act, by transforming every New Year into the inauguration of an era, permits the return of the dead to life, and maintains the hope of the faithful in the resurrection of the body...let us note that the beliefs, held almost everywhere, according to which the dead return to their families (and often return as "living dead") at the New Year season (during the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany) signify the hope that the abolition of time is possible at this mythical moment, in which the world is destroyed and recreated. The dead can come back now, for all barriers between the dead and the living are broken (is not primordial chaos reactualized?), and they will come back because at this paradoxical instant time will be suspended, hence they can again be contemporaries of the living. Moreover, since a new Creation is then in preparation, they can hope for a return to life that will be enduring and concrete.⁵⁶

At no point either in Dawn of Night does the return of the dead, even when the dead are recognized as family members, signify a restorative act. The "primordial chaos" of Romero's civilization is never understood in theological/anthropological terms. Rather than the return of the dead signifying the unification and salvation of humanity, it refers to processes of repetition and escape. Mechanisms of death and the corporeality of the body (best reflected in Tom Savini's makeup effects) are central fixations. Instead of death seen as offering the promise of new life, it is to be avoided as a realm representing a disturbing fact about the nature of existence. As Romero uses the zombies as metaphors for the death of consciousness, we must see the gradual entry of society into the world of the zombies as the death of collective spirit, and the refusal of death as the refusal of a nascent temptation toward insentience, torpor, inversion. Here the urban apocalypse takes on its most pronounced secular manifestation as a denial of history, primitive belief structure, and the revelation associated with Western theology.

Various characters of Dawn of the Dead go through moments of epiphany connected to instances of killing or the reclaiming of life; but

⁵⁶Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 62.

Romero does not use the metaphor of death to signify any positive change in the nature of his characters, or their choice of death over life, life over death, as having some redemptive value. We know that Roger is spiritually dead before he is bitten by the zombie; he becomes "deader than dead" as he continues to indulge in his consumer wonderland even when facing the prospect of certain death. He is the only character in a Romero film whose suffering is prolonged after an assault by a zombie; instead of immediately entering the world of the undead, he becomes an invalid. This focus on an aspect of sickness and death is quite apart from most of Romero's concerns, but it does much to explain his use of the image of the zombie. As an invalid Roger is the conventional burden whose presence accelerates a process of disunity in the miniature society of survivors. He forces their immobility and their facing the inevitability of their own deaths. Roger's increasing dependence on morphine (pain was never referred to in either Night or Dawn as an element of the zombie plague) adds another jarring note in reminding the survivors that their own various addictions are threatened as supplies are exhausted. Roger's eventual death and "resurrection" as a zombie triggers an epiphany of a wholly negative sort in Peter, who instantly kills Roger and realizes their unresolved relationship.

Even as his relationship with Fran becomes strained, Steven fights valiantly to protect the group. He is nevertheless overwhelmed by the zombies and as a member of the living dead betrays his friends. As in the claiming of the other victims, Steven's zombiefication is an initiation for which he was predestined by a flaw, a lack of humanity in his character. Peter hesitates before blowing Steven's head off (as he hesitates before dispatching Roger) and for a moment points a gun to his own head.

Although he destroys Steven and escapes with Fran (pregnant with Steven's child) Peter's descent may be total. The most resourceful of the group, at the end he does not take control of the helicopter for the escape. This "role reversal," with Fran at the helm, has little significance from a sexual/political standpoint since Peter has shown no evidence of any intellectual/emotional transition aside from the trauma that has left him almost as removed from reality as his lost buddies. The notion of Fran going off with her child to begin a new world is undercut by the very title of the film. Romero's forthcoming project, Day of the Dead, suggests that the zombies are to become the operative society.

Brueghel's Triumph of Death may be the closest correlate we have to Dawn of the Dead's idea that "When there is no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth." Human venality and corruption are at issue here, not questions of eschatology associated with a just end to history, the reassertion of God's kingdom, and the reclamation of soul and body. The zombies' physical corruption recalls W.W. Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw"--how could God or man want to reclaim the monstrosity of dead human flesh? Brueghel's panoramic hellscapes, without the Renaissance fixation on the central figure or ideal point-of-view, compare with the meandering nature of Romero's narrative and his use of the four protagonists as sources of audience identification and as a means of establishing the work as allegorical. Even the allegorical enterprise is deflated since the moralizing force of allegory--which found a sturdy matrix in the apocalyptic art of the Middle Ages, to which Romero consciously refers--is largely ignored. The location of this narrative in such a specific political, economic, and technological environment makes it equivalent in many respects to the dominant readings of urban society in the apocalyptic art of tradition, but

its refusal of any moral, ethical, or political focus (beyond the exceptionally bleak and functional mechanism of "allegory" per se) makes the work a culmination of one aspect of the apocalyptic genre.

If we are to understand the assertion of the traditional apocalyptic hellscape as prevailing image in the film, we must also be able to differentiate this image and its moral content from the world of Romero's film. The streak of moralism that affects Romero's satiric indictment of consumer society is diluted, as in Escape from New York and Mad Max, by the simple urge to revel in the midst of the irreversible calamity. As in Brueghel, the agents of death are avengers, ultimately agents of the divinity. More important to Dawn of the Dead's context as genre film, the zombies are heroes, despite the film's use of more conventional protagonists for audience identification. After all, the image of the zombie is used to promote the film, to sell T-shirts and magazines. To immerse in the void of death becomes the only recognizable, viable criticism of the failing current society; the ideological criticism that applauds the satire in Romero's films must also address this deficiency and by so doing question the assertion of apocalypse as a way of challenging the dominant political order.

V

It would be inappropriate to end this discussion of the cinema of urban apocalypse without some attention to Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver (1975), a film central to the development of apocalypticism as a controlling force in contemporary film and one whose climate is relevant to what has already been analyzed. In many respects Taxi Driver shows a remarkable awareness of the apocalyptic concerns of American art having a culmination in the horror film of the 1970s; more important, it shows the cen-

trality of the horror film to American cinema and how the genre has assisted in constructing the apocalyptic film as a genre unto itself.

A case has already been made for Taxi Driver as a horror film,⁵⁷ and if one is still concerned about straining definitions, an attention to the film's Powellian photography, the music of Bernard Herrmann, the theme of descent, the psychopath-as-monster, and the horrific bloodshed should be quite sufficient to justify the categorization. Like much of the apocalyptic cinema, Taxi Driver shows an equal debt to other genres. The importance of film noir is evident in the morbid atmosphere of the film; the focus on misdirected or perverse sexuality, the chiaroscuro urban setting, psychopathology as a theme, and, again, the contribution of Herrmann's score. The Western is important in the themes of revenge and rescue (comparisons have been made to The Searchers⁵⁸), the dream of Utopia and a new frontier, the references to cowboy and Indian imagery, forms of gunplay that quote specific Westerns, and the idea of the hero returning from war.

There is more to be concerned with here than the presences of Scorsese and fellow "movie brat" screenwriter Paul Schrader. The attention to so many elements of popular American art ultimately points to the desiccation of these genres, despite the bravura gestures of the film's creators. The visionary elements of European cinema quoted in Taxi Driver collide with American popular art; can Travis Bickle be both a Peckinpah character and Bresson's country priest? The film proposes purgative violence over a more dangerous introspection and solipsism, but

⁵⁷Robin Wood, "The Incoherent Text: Narrative in the '70s," Movie 27/28 (Winter 1980/Spring 1981):26.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 30.

then recognizes through its absurdist ending the failure of violence as social ritual, or at least as ritual celebrated by American myth.

The urban setting of the film works not solely as a citation of film noir but for the suggestion that such genres signify the frustrations of others (the Western) in continuing to project the American mythos and the philosophy of progress in earlier art. The archetypal demonic city is cited by the use of Dostoevsky and "high culture" to represent America as repository of extinct tradition and to attempt, in the manner of Coppola, to connect this culture to a mass audience in such a way that "high art" finally becomes accessible and an aid to the interpretation of the work at hand. In this sense Scorsese and Coppola share a populism diluted by an unremitting pessimism.

The character of Travis Bickle clearly refers to the narrator of Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground and, tangentially, a line of demented visionaries that can be seen as progeny of St. John, the last apostle. Bickle, like St. John and Dostoevsky's narrator (and Willard in Apocalypse Now) has the appearance of moralist. As in Dostoevsky, the text reveals ambivalence regarding the location of evil in subject or object; the idea of an omniscient Other, clearly linked in Bickle's case to images of patriarchy, aggravates this uncertainty and provokes crisis. Like Underground Man, Bickle is a hypochondriac ("I think I have stomach cancer") just as Dostoevsky's narrator opens his narrative with a complaint about liver disease. But this hypochondria is the first signpost in the character's schizophrenia. While maintaining his moralism, Bickle is thoroughly ambivalent about every aspect of his argument as he continues his interior dialogue, which, as in Notes, is the substance of the work. Dostoevsky's narrator decries his own malady and medical science, yet professes an

admiration for doctors; Bickle, who sees himself as "God's lonely man," shows contempt for a life of "morbid self-attention."

George Steiner's commentary on Notes from Underground regards the work as a representative assault on capitalism from the right,⁵⁹ advancing the belief that evil and self-destruction are part of a concordance with God and are the inevitable tools of an apocalyptic destiny. Steiner shows Dostoevsky's comradeship with Nietzsche, Stirner, and Sorel, who assert an absolute, unreasonable, and pessimistic individual liberty in place of any notion of social justice or economic progress. Scorsese's vision is not so rarefied, but the transposition of the underground man into America is compelling.

Travis Bickle is the returning warrior, but the battle he survived is even more vaguely defined than the one from which Ethan Edwards returned in The Searchers. Vietnam provides a backdrop for Bickle as the Civil War does for Edwards; both return as alienated men to a void, a void in the sense that the community cannot be located in any genuinely satisfying way. Taxi Driver confronts squarely questions raised in American art about the man of action vs. contemplative man. Ethan Edwards attempts to force a role in the community by avoiding introspection; Bickle almost destroys himself and the community by contemplation that produces demons. In neither instance do the two works, in their respective periods of filmmaking, address any questions about the viability of the community itself in any manner articulated along social or economic lines. The Indian-as-demon in The Searchers is a traditional element,⁶⁰ but Edwards's

⁵⁹See George Steiner's Introduction to Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground and The Gambler (New York: The Heritage Press, 1967).

⁶⁰The Indian-as-devil is much discussed in Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence. The best study of the relationship of this question to

self-recognition has less to do with an understanding of regeneration through violence than with a self-abasing internalization of his own prejudice and irreconcilable separation from the community. In Travis Bickle resides the frustrated frontiersman whose demons are now generalized. His thinking refers to the Puritans for its apocalyptic language. Travis dreams of the "real rain" that will "wash all the trash and garbage off the streets." As Travis awaits apocalypse, he begins to conceive of himself as a man of special destiny, but even at the climactic moment he sees the destiny as wholly arbitrary--we recognize in him the apocalyptic impulse centered on provoking drama and crisis.

Bickle's turmoil is the culmination of Ethan Edwards's inner turmoil. The frustration of both men is brought about by their tendency to think in ultimate terms and their inability to connect any internal or external evil to a specific historical situation. We discover the consequences of this situation in Bickle's inability to find any consistency in his own thinking, his simultaneously idealized and catastrophic vision of the exterior world. Bickle berates the "venal" people of New York street life, the "scum, the pimps, buggers, and queers," but he is not only inexorably drawn to violence and pornography, he is unable to distinguish between "filth" and what he sees as a right and fitting ideal of beauty. A good instance is when he takes Betsy to see the sex movie Sometimes Sweet Susan; Betsy reacts violently: "This is like saying 'let's fuck.'" Travis says, "I don't know much about movies...Tell me what you want to see." Travis accepts pornography and violence as a given of the natural world; by asking Betsy what she "wants to see" Travis is trying to find out if

The Searchers is Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington, John Ford (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), pp. 150-162.

there is such a thing as an alternative vision.

Travis is a moralist who watches only pornography; like Norman Bates in Psycho, Travis's scopophilia signifies his inversion and the incorporation of a dominant power consciously rejected. Travis is too demented to be a hypocrite; he genuinely believes that this inversion is universal and can be changed only by some external force. Travis asks the politician Pallantine to "clean up the city of all the dirt." He believes (yet does not believe) that Pallantine must be responsible for a purgative activity that is as supernatural as the "great rain" he envisions. That Travis respects yet decides to kill Pallantine can be seen as part of the same Oedipal dilemma that causes Travis to write letters to his parents containing flowery and misleading accounts of his life in New York. We are constantly refocused on concrete symptoms of Travis's psychopathology. His voyeuristic "gaze" at everything in his experience signifies his unsuccessful integration in the object-world. The association of the "gaze" with power and both homicidal and suicidal compulsions is clearly drawn when Travis watches a woman at her window while her jealous husband raves on about "what a .44 Magnum will do to a woman's pussy." An extension of the gaze's power, the .44 Magnum is the first gun Travis buys from Easy Andy.

The traditional pathology of repetition is the most transparent evidence of Travis's ailment, and it is again a predicament portrayed as transpsychical, cumulative, and leading toward the apocalyptic crisis. Travis is stricken with a perpetual insomnia, and as if to make use of all those waking hours he drives his cab constantly.

I go anywhere--the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem--every night
I clean the come off the back seat--sometimes I clean the blood
off.

In fact Travis goes nowhere; he is concerned that "one day blends into the next." The circularity of Travis's actions further provokes his crisis. As the circle continues Travis's desires cause his thinking to fluctuate radically from self-deification to despair. The power of language to dispel the crisis becomes increasingly doubtful, a signal of Travis's general impotence. His conversation with the Wizard is patently worthless, a fact made humorous by the Wizard's reputation as prophet and analyst. Wizard casually writes off Travis's anguish as a form of the blues, but then admits he doesn't know what Travis is talking about. The most that Travis can articulate is his sense that

Some bad things are going on in my head, you know--something--I want to do something--something has to happen.

The "something" takes many minor forms: the admiration of the dream girl Betsy, the attempt to convert Iris, the vague interest in the Pallantine campaign, the hatred of Sport and Tom. In each instance Travis misinterprets the value or meaning of the interaction, choosing instead to view each relationship in terms that will in some way respond to his self-image as God or demon. One irony here is his hatred for Betsy's co-worker Tom, viewed by Travis as a rival (but rationalized to Betsy as some evil force) but who is one of the more impotent figures within Travis's circle: Tom jokingly tells Betsy "I'll be the male in this relationship" when Betsy asks him to chase Travis away.

On at least one level Scorsese seems to be repeating Steiner's criticism of the image of the Romantic individual and his sense of autonomy.⁶¹ As Travis is a figure out of the Western and film noir, his illness and

⁶¹This is brilliantly illuminated in René Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structures, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 257-89.

alienation are extensions of the sense of autonomy projected by the Romantic hero of American myth. Travis's fluctuation between New Testament moralism and self-abasing defeat is the consequence of his incorporation of a sense of heroic autonomy that contains an exaggerated, unrealistic system of power. In the role of reformer Travis assumes the position of God but also simple aggressor; the failure of that extreme model propels him into masochism, but obviously the roles are interlinked in such a way as to ensure the self-perpetuation of the construct. What is being revealed is a utopianism that seems to have existed in Travis before the narrative began. Certainly the entirety of Travis's thinking--from his dream of the "great rain" to the idealized vision of the family--depends on an apocalyptic impulse; the film suggests the millennialism dominant in American art to have a collective psychopathological foundation. Scorsese develops this by showing that Travis's view of the exterior world is simultaneously valid and hallucinatory. When Travis leaves the cafeteria with Wizard a black street gang passes by as if an apparition. They are viewed as threatening by the audience and Travis, but at this stage of the film they must also be seen as an "effect" that projects Travis's extreme state of mind. A similar scene occurs inside the cafeteria when a black cab driver comments on Travis's bankroll and points a make-believe pistol at him fashioned from thumb and forefinger. The camera tracks away with the same ethereal grace as when Travis spies the black gang a second later. Travis views the cab driver with the same anxiety and menace he aims at the gang. Yet what Travis consistently sees as a force of evil has merely internalized the same set of values that entrap him and ensure the circle of repetition. When Travis buys the .44 Magnum, Easy Andy reminds him he could as easily "sell it to a jungle

bunny in Harlem for a thousand dollars." Andy sells everything from guns to drugs to Cadillacs, catering to the various deluded versions of Travis in the city. In such instances the film translates the compulsion and frenzy of the city as a whole, with its conflicting mechanisms of desire, as the apocalypse in macrocosm.

The gun-buying scene is particularly important, as Travis sees it as a "moment of change" in a humdrum existence, a break in the cycle of repetition and inversion. This moment is for Travis another divinely-ordained circumstance moving him closer to a special destiny. This destiny "becomes clearer" in Travis's mind as he moves from his junk-food-and-pills existence to a Spartan period of physical training, self-discipline, and resolve. This period, like what preceded it, is based on the same impulse toward self-destruction. In the purchase of the guns, we discover more evidence of Travis's incorporation of the dominant "venal" culture he claims to reject. The gun-buying scene has many metacinematic aspects, presenting a kind of condensed repository of popular culture that has been a contributing force in Travis's delusions. Travis buys a Walther PPK (James Bond), a snub-nose Smith & Wesson .38 (Mike Hammer), a pocket-sized .25 automatic (also Bond ordinance), and the .44 Magnum (the most popular handgun in America following the success of Dirty Harry). Travis mounts the .25 automatic on a retractable spring he wears up his sleeve, the trick of riverboat gamblers and Robert Conrad in "The Wild, Wild West."

This "moment of change" is such an extreme provoking of inversion that it leads to the crisis Travis interprets as his transcendence to a new role: the man of action. But his buying of the guns reveals only the compulsive consumer, egged on by the sly manipulation of Easy Andy. The creation of the various stick-up rigs is his fetishization of these

objects as his descent continues. Travis's solitary practicing with the guns (the famous "You talkin' to me?" sequence) is the grossest parody of the Lacanian "mirror-stage." De Niro faces the camera for part of Travis's practice session; the camera lens has the function of Travis's mirror, with which there can be no reciprocation. At the same time the gesture necessarily equates the mirror with the lens and a connection with the audience; the audience is expected to share the pathology and accept as a given the alienation Travis's character projects. The lens becomes the instrument in distorting the "mirror-stage" of development and helping to affirm the sense of crisis as transpsychical and collective. Travis's recognition of the "Other" (the audience) is actually his utter absorption in the alienation of Self; the horror of this moment occurs as the lens is confirmed as an instrument of alienation, a barrier to communication.

That Travis's descent is now rapid is emphasized by a particularly telling scene. Travis watches a soap opera on TV while absent-mindedly holding the .44 Magnum in one hand. Travis is not so much watching the TV as drifting in some vague deliberation, his left boot tipping the TV back and forth. It is as if Travis is almost consciously engaged in breaking the cycle of repetition and forcing some conscious reconciliation between activity and passive intake, but the banality of television and the empty super-revolver signify states of experience that have nothing to do with allowing the conscious mind to attain self-recognition. When Travis tips over the TV it for a moment seems an act of aggression against more of the "garbage" foisted on him. Yet there is enough sanity remaining in Travis to have him view his destruction of his own property as a useless act ultimately aimed at himself; at the same time the very game with the TV suggests a sense of caprice within Travis's suicidal tendency that marks advanced disinter-

gration (Travis mutters "Jesus, Jesus!" and presses his fists to his head).

This caprice is further seen in Travis's final decision to act. He feels assured of the need for "true force," and that "All the king's horses and all the king's men could not put it together again." It is clear that the "it" is society but also Travis himself. Travis's vision of a personal Armageddon is drawn along the lines of the "last stand" of The Magnificent Seven, The Alamo, The Wild Bunch, Walking Tall; neither the attempt on Pallantine nor the rescue of Iris has any genuinely political aspect, since at this point Travis represents the total atomization of the community, his action being a desperate attempt at an affirmation of self. Like his namesake who accepted martyrdom commanding the Alamo garrison, Travis sees his personal mission as above and beyond the interests of the collectivity, but the society must naturally benefit from any decision made since Travis, absolutely alienated, is always a representative man. The Mohawk haircut he adopts is the caricatured rendering of the psychotic Vietnam veteran, but as a reminder of the brutal effects of the military the shaven head refers to its original meaning in connoting the potential suicide. Viewing the sequence today we cannot help but contemplate the emptying of signification in once potent symbols of culture; the vitality of the American Indian has been drained in various ways, culminating in the co-optation of his symbols by punk culture, a supposedly radical force in fact representing the extreme disruption of a common code. With the Mohawk haircut Travis also actualizes the image of the Indian as demon/victim; Travis will either absorb the Indian's magic and revitalize the community or acquiesce to martyrdom, hoping, in the tradition of American melodrama, that death will provide an ennobling moment, a "right place to go."

It is interesting that in the wake of the attempted assassination of

Ronald Reagan Taxi Driver should be resurrected to be misinterpreted and used as propaganda. Mass media, deliberately ignorant of impact or reflective theories of art and society, perpetuate Travis Bickle's thinking on a general scale, but in so doing reveal the tense dialectic in American society between apocalyptic and political world-views. Understanding the use of Taxi Driver in relation to the attempt on Reagan illuminates the perpetuation of this dialectic.

BBC journalist Anthony Summers has termed the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination "apocalyptic" footage while proceeding to examine this assassination in a political context.⁶² It seems natural to look at the assassinations of the '60s as acts of mythic dimension and of overwhelming consequence to American life, but it is possible for a mythic mechanism to remain intact while allowing for analysis not depending on loosely-defined notions of "American character" and spiritual destiny. This is not the thinking operating in the media observations of the Reagan attempt vis-à-vis Scorsese's film. As in the 1960s, violence is again shown to be something endemic to American character, frequently manifest in the works of irresponsible or exploitative artists, whose works in turn go on further to provoke the "sick minds" of society. It is rare for this pervasive violence to be examined in a political or economic framework--violence is simply "there" in a tautological existence, the only explanation for it being its long-developing history in American experience. The focus on the universality of violence creates an extreme situation; if evil is everywhere, how can it be defined? To mystify this subject is obviously to remove it from a political/historical dimension. The individual (and

⁶²Anthony Summers, Conspiracy (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), p. 47.

society) becomes a victim, who by incorporating the total system of violence of the amorphous oppressor becomes also a demon, and because of his basic impotence in the face of the law and self-doubt, can only live in suspicion or turn violence inward. As if to intuit this extreme potential situation in the collectivity, an occasional mythic apparatus can be constructed to displace violence, as in Watergate. While Nixon was utilized as the demon/scapegoat through whom violence was to be displaced, thus regenerating the organism ("Our long national nightmare is over"), the mythic function dissolved. The sacrifice of Nixon clearly failed as ritual, not only because it was incomplete, but because it was revealed as ritual per se and one that did not genuinely respond to a consensus. That consensus had long since fragmented with the polarization of society and the adversary relationship of the population to the sources of power, which traditionally embody mythic beliefs. The sacrificial crisis of Watergate occurred as the true nature of the scandal as embodiment of the gangsterism, betrayal, and fragmentation at the upper reaches of power was revealed. As political and economic analyses of dominant ideology were avoided, the population could only fall into the self-deprecating belief that the "disease" of violence had overtaken the sources of power as it had long since overtaken and polluted the rest of the body politic, resulting in the "moral schizophrenia" Tobe Hooper wanted to respond to in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.

The same moral schizophrenia is very much at the heart of Taxi Driver. Travis Bickle's assault on the brothel at the end of Taxi Driver is plausible in its characteristic arbitrariness. Travis's violence is born out of his fixation on the romance of the individual, which develops to a pathological situation as his isolated judgments lack any frame of reference

in society. On the conscious level he is both God and self-abasing devil; he wants to rid the world of a non-descript and "venal" politician, or save the naive Iris from pimps and gangsters, but neither action is recognizable in terms of the traditional hero's rescue of the community. Pallantine is chosen because he is a demon who circulates in Betsy's world, from which Travis is excluded. Sport and his friends are demons who interfere with Travis's idealized vision of Iris. The choice to attack the brothel did not come about simply because the attempt on Pallantine failed. The hatred of Sport and the disgust at corruption focused on Pallantine are framed by a much larger anger. Travis's violence is the all-encompassing apocalyptic gesture that chooses both the self and the world, emphasized in Travis's attempted suicide after the bloodbath, which he goes about as deliberately as the other killings.

Scorsese and Schrader seem intent in this ending to expose an important element of the "last stands" of American action film by taking into account some of its philosophical premises. There is little question that they have tapped the apocalyptic belief within this type of violence, which proposes the redeeming value of death, the preference for death over rational reform, and the belief in massive violence as a redemptive ritual of the community. But the belief in the ritual function of violence described by Girard, Slotkin, and others is criticized in Taxi Driver's conclusion, which many critics have attacked as far more fantastic than the violence that precedes it. Travis is not valorized in death; rather, he survives to be rewarded by a community in a way that Shane and Ethan Edwards never really were. But Travis's rewards are slim and he does not fully integrate into the community; at the most he commands some temporary respect from the male group and some fleeting fascination from

the girl who spurned him. More important, the admiration Travis now enjoys is born out of a superficial and misleading image of him perpetuated by the media (the news clippings on the wall) and by the political structure afraid to examine its own flaws. It is easier to make a media hero out of Travis than reveal his ties to an assassination attempt and reawaken concerns about violence, and, possibly, internal strife overall. This may be giving the film a bit much, since its apolitical view of assassination and its casual incorporation of the Arthur Bremer-"lone nut" construct ignores any critical interpretation of the criminal's relationship to dominant ideology, nor, as noted, does it treat assassination precisely as a political act. Yet the very apocalyptic current of this film, with its cynical ending and emphasis on the collapse of codes and pervasive alienation, may suggest a new and necessary cataclysm that must precede radical transformation.

While Taxi Driver criticizes the apocalyptic current in American art, it is itself apocalyptic in its view of the current atmosphere as irredeemable. On one level the film seems to show little belief in the redeeming quality of violence and the apocalyptic "sense of an ending" that is relied upon to provide dramatic closure to a work. It is unimportant whether or not Travis's final drifting into the night suggests that the cycle of violence may begin again. It seems apparent that general alienation is seen as profound, pervasive, and resistant to any interpretation or cure. This modern, thoroughly pessimistic and secular position is enough for us to regard Taxi Driver as a work of modern horror and about the urban apocalypse. It is important also to understand Taxi Driver as an emblematic work whose meaning can be read on several complementary levels. As the film embodies currents of several genres, it

projects the urban apocalypse as the destruction of all created artifice (seen as tainted and corrupt), an idea of the end that is deliberately suicidal in conception. This pessimism is transmitted chiefly by the film's devaluation and exposure of the codes and conventions that made genre cinema work. This is an enterprise similar to what has already been discussed in this paper. If the films discussed in Chapter II are involved primarily in describing the failure of the general langue of the external American civilizing experience, the films of urban apocalypse are concerned more fundamentally with the failure of the individual parole, the speech act that can be seen as the work of art effecting exchange and communion.

CHAPTER V

THE END OF MYTH: THE LAST WAVE AND APOCALYPSE NOW

At various points in this paper the crisis shown as constituting the apocalypse represented in the horror film has been discussed in terms of a transmutation (or collapse) of collective belief. An attempt has been made to define the notion of "collective belief" through reference to several disciplines, including psychoanalysis and structural anthropology, but what is most compelling about the apocalypticism of these films, as has been noted, is the refusal to accept the consensus represented by these totalizing theories of the individual and society. The nature of the genuinely apocalyptic work is to deny the purpose of analysis in providing closure and a "happy ending" to narrative art; a representative example of this phenomenon is the relationship of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre to Psycho, where the former deliberately omits the "psychoanalytic ending" of the latter. The intervention of the psychiatrist in Hitchcock's film does more than "make sense" of the story for the audience; it provides a framing device to contain the film and add a sense of stability to what would otherwise be a highly disconcerting look at contemporary American rural life, along with an unnerving reworking of the horror genre itself.

The "psychopathology of everyday life" certainly isn't the only focus of the contemporary horror film. In this typological survey of some of the themes of the apocalyptic cinema, one unifying principle discovered is the assault on myths shaping the fundamental vision of the American civilizing experience. One irony of this assault, an irony that forms the

foundation of the apocalyptic work, is that crisis becomes accentuated as myth becomes steadily debunked.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and The Hills Have Eyes describe a pervasive insanity portrayed as the culmination of the American frontier myth; the mythic foundation of the frontier experience is parodied as the world is shown dissolving into chaos without the necessary regeneration embodied in the myth of primordial origins. David Cronenberg's films actually use ancient myths to describe the contemporary state of dissolution, primarily to show the deficiency of these myths to instruct or regenerate. The demonic possession films are extremely ambivalent about the power of the most potent myth--organized religion--to provide stability and cohesion to society. While pretending to admit to the "enlightened" insights of psychoanalysis and other disciplines, the chief concern of many demonic possession films is to agonize over religion's increasing inability to respond to traditional notions of evil, and by so doing provide consensus to society. The "urban apocalypse" films are even more immersed in nostalgia while they deconstruct the myths of American civilization and the artistic conventions they spawn. By consciously referring to specific myths, films such as The Road Warrior end up depriving myths of their power simply by turning them into romance; as we shall develop, this process, according to Lévi-Strauss, is a basic means of destroying myth.¹

One dilemma confronted in analyzing the breakdown of myth is the lack of agreement among scholars on an adequate definition of mythic belief. When this is understood the project of defining "collective" belief within American civilization becomes difficult. While it has not been our purpose

¹Claude Lévi-Strauss, "How Myths Die," New Literary History 2 (Winter 1974):269-281.

here to speculate about the relationship of the work of art to society, or about the ways by which patterns of belief emerge within society, our concern most obviously has been to comment on cinema's attempt to portray an apocalypse arising out of the failure of myth as perceived by the work of art that is a product of culture. Yet the question remains as to how exactly myth is viewed by contemporary film, and how the "failure" of myth is supposed to constitute an apocalypse suggesting total upheaval and the end to history.

As stated, the consensus about the formation and, above all, the value of myth is open to question. Roland Barthes and some of the Marxist-oriented semiological critics refer to a concept of "mythic speech" where myth is used pejoratively to signify a process by which an image is removed from a political/historical context.² In his discussion of constructs as diverse as military recruiting posters and architecture, Barthes points out that mythic conceptions can be relied upon to create a situation of tautology (something "is because it is"); the object is total, isolated, impervious to historical process and analysis: in short, mythic. Barthes admits that mythic belief underlies all discourse, and that it is the nature of history to unravel myth's infiltration of language and its attempt to make itself seem an endemic component of history.

Structural anthropology regards myth with a wholly different perspective. Lévi-Strauss "journeys to the primeval gardens of primitive societies to restore the lost gods of myth and to reveal the hidden rules of human community."³ Like much of anthropology even outside the domain

²Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

³Vincent B. Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 19.

of structuralism, Lévi-Strauss initiates the view that myth is part of an unconscious operation that precedes even the thinking subject, is the basis of language and of ideological and historical interpretation; this is to say that Lévi-Strauss's synchronic analysis proposes that mythic beliefs are not only uniform within periods of history, but that they cause history to be viewed constantly through the prisms of myth.⁴ Although Lévi-Strauss was willing to undertake painstaking analyses of the operation of various myths within given contexts--presumably for the purpose of exploring the work of myth in society--there is little question that he regards myth with nostalgia and guilt, guilt for participating in the deconstruction of myth.⁵ Lévi-Strauss seems the representative example of the scholar caught up in a conundrum; since he feels the business of writing is a step in the destruction of the mythic dimension he wants to describe (and restore?), his work by its nature is geared toward moving the reader further and further away from the subject he wants to explain.

What is important in understanding the essence of Lévi-Strauss and anthropology is the whole notion of myth's "desirability" and its formative function to experience. Although working with a very different method, Mircea Eliade carries this view several steps further. The conflict of myth vs. history and ideology is not important to Eliade. Like more contemporary writers such as René Girard, Eliade sees myth as absolutely essential to civilization, including those of Western society that deconstruct (particularly in the wake of the mass media and cybernetic era) the workings

⁴Such a view of Lévi-Strauss is offered in Edith Kurzwel, The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 13-29.

⁵See Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism, p. 33.

of myth in the formation of belief. Girard's eye, like Barthes's, is more critical, showing that new myths are constantly being generated out of the very process of deconstruction and analysis, and that myth is needed to give credibility to a standing political order.

Eliade assumes quite simply that myth is the underpinning of all experience, the basis of language and the viability and vitality of society. He explains this by a precise definition:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment of reality--an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a creation; it relates how something was produced, began to be.⁶

Eliade goes on to explain that the importance of myth is in its ability to explain origins, and the connections of origins to the sacred. Eliade uses as an example the attempt to teach a child not what was performed by a parent or grandparent, but what was established by ancestors, ultimately suggesting a world outside of temporal history.⁷ Thus the basis for communication is set by a society's understanding of its origins, by the belief in the solidity of itself because of its genesis in a sacred past. Language is formed around the acceptance of tales of mythic origins; language's evolution from myth is evident also in the enactment of rituals that describe myths, re-create them, and provide a vocabulary that filters into the everyday interaction of the society.

It is not difficult to see how this basic understanding of myth applies to what I have referred to as the shattered "collective beliefs" of

⁶Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 5.

⁷Ibid., p. 34.

society addressed by the apocalyptic horror film. From the early vision of America as Promised Land to the captivity and rescue narratives to the images of Boone and Crockett leading a new nation into the wilderness to the concept of Manifest Destiny, American art has been steeped in a mythic tradition traceable to much earlier civilizations and deeply involved with drawing a people together in the belief that each action has some sacred resonance.

The "loss of myth" is clearly one source of anxiety within the apocalyptic cinema. Even the very cynical work of George Romero cannot be considered an objective, ideologically-oriented deconstruction of myth, since he marshals the ideas and artifacts of older forms of expression without even a glimmer of what a rejuvenated society outside of the province of "American myth" might resemble. Above all, the horror film now seems involved in what Lévi-Strauss termed a romantic elaboration that destroys the force of myth.⁸ It is clear that the horror film has moved beyond the mere description of myth or, rather, the transmutation of myth into narrative. This process was underway for a number of years in other film genres, especially the Western. By deconstructing and debunking the role of the supernatural, a key component of myth itself and the essential nature of this particular genre, the fantastique begins to strike a blow at myth, self-consciously since the purpose of the assault is to demonstrate the "bad" and deceitful aspect of myth.

I have already stated that the horror film's primary importance today may be in suggesting the particular forms of apocalypse articulated in various manifestations of artistic expression. I will conclude this paper by examining two films outside the genre--Peter Weir's The Last Wave

⁸See Lévi-Strauss, "How Myths Die."

and Francis Coppola's Apocalypse Now--that bolster this contention. One could argue that both of these films can be termed horror films because of the form of apocalypse they describe, or that their use of conventions of the modern horror film leads them into the theme of apocalypse, but this begins a chicken-or-the-egg discussion. A case has already been made for Apocalypse Now as horror film, and its basic stylistic conventions give ready credence to such an interpretation. The Last Wave fits more easily into the category of the fantastique, although it is stylistically very innovative, shot with a realistic eye, and not as dependent on the conventions of Gothic horror as the more allusionistic Apocalypse Now. But why regard these two films as representative summary statements on a theme in the horror film? By the imperative of its title, its rather celebrated position in late 1970s cinema, and its recurring centrality in discussions of apocalypticism, Apocalypse Now simply demands attention. The Last Wave deals deliberately with the subject of apocalypse, and some of its contentions are not dissimilar to elements of Coppola's film. More important, both films are concerned with humanity cut off from its mythic origins, the inability of society to recoup the magic of myth needed to restore itself, and the resultant self-immolation (almost Wagnerian) called for when the betrayal or loss of myth has been realized.

If a totalizing theory of the horror film's apocalypse can be offered, it may be contained in these two works. By asserting that the fantastique is concerned with debunking "myth" one must not conclude that these films address solely the sacred or supernatural contentions underneath belief, although this is a prime function. Science (psychoanalysis) also constitutes a myth that is in turn used to back up another myth (the stability of the home and the rural community) in Psycho.

While The Birds dispenses with science and relies on myth to explain society's downfall, there is nothing about this myth to explain "sacred origins" or even to connect it to religious texts in a way that would help provide narrative coherence and closure to the work. One point of The Birds may be that humanity is so removed from understanding the mythic patterns that operate to determine behavior, it must be "reminded" by outright supernatural intervention; the joke here is that Mitch Brenner and the others are unable to name an unnameable force precisely as supernatural (the case of Mrs. Bundy) and are unable to survive given their remoteness from myth. Since anthropology describes myth as a means of forming a very tangible coherence within society; the loss of myth can also be read as the disappearance of any basis of communication, another element of The Birds.

The myth of the Wasteland is central in various respects to The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Hills Have Eyes, Mad Max, Escape from New York, and Dawn of the Dead. The difficulty here is that the self-reflexivity involved in exposing this myth itself forms part of the crisis, the issue covertly addressed by Apocalypse Now. The dilemma of The Exorcist and the subsequent demonic possession films concerns the tension over the debate between faith and reason; The Last Wave suggests that, if it was ever wise to undertake this debate, it has occurred too late to rescue humanity from the necessary self-immolation for its distance from myth.

II

Like the "Mad Max" films of fellow Australian George Miller, Peter Weir's The Last Wave (1977) takes a two-level approach to the ques-

tion of myth in modern society. The Road Warrior suggests that the fantasy film still retains the power to compel the viewer, but its vitality becomes increasingly depleted as the myths within the genre become transparent, or lose their force through repetition. The junked, post-industrial landscape in the George Miller films is especially important as it contains not just the remains of the industrial world but an adjacent cultural heritage that has been transmogrified and often debased by the now-waning experience of civilization. At the same time the new Australian cinema (especially the fantastique) shows an attempt to relocate a mythic past buried within the hypnotizing terrain of the Outback; Australia's "great blank" now seems to have as much mystery for the Western world as the frontier had for the literary imagination of the United States.⁹

Peter Weir's early films The Cars that Ate Paris (1973), Picnic at Hanging Rock (1976), and The Last Wave (1977) share various levels of concern both for the collapse of the previous society and the need to unearth some preternatural truth. The recurring totemic images of The Last Wave show that it is foremost of the Australian films concerned with the conflict of the past vs. the present, Nature vs. Culture, myth vs. science, reason, and politics. While it is difficult to call The Last Wave a horror film as such, this film may help to renovate the genre by its conscious attempt to address some issues deliberately skirted by The Exorcist and other key works of the 1970s. Among these issues are the demarcation

⁹Aside from the fantastic film, the works most popular in the New Australian cinema have strong ties to genres recognized as "endemically American," viz., the Western, romance, the war film, melodrama, populist or "human interest" film. This is not to suggest that the Australian cinema has nothing original to express about Australian culture and simply re-works American genres, but rather to indicate that the popularity of the Australian cinema may rest in its fascination with myth, indicated by the dominance of genre forms dying out in the United States.

points between mystical belief and insanity; the role of the mythic in explaining societal breakdown; and how the unconscious mind works to suppress the facts of psychic upheaval, upheaval that can be shown to be transpsychical. The Last Wave is a marvelous conjugation of Freud, Jung, and Lévi-Strauss in its exploration of the personal, cultural, and mythical interconnections within the new spirit of apocalypse permeating modern art. If we are to continue using psychoanalysis and anthropology to explain the horror film and the rest of the fantastique, The Last Wave may provide a means to understand why these disciplines are viable.

In The Last Wave David Burton is a Sydney attorney overcome with bizarre dreams and hallucinations, most of which contain images of water. In one waking vision David sees all of Sydney submerged by a flood; although water trickles through his radio, David remains safe in his car to watch drowned bodies float by in an underwater ballet. In the central and most frightening vision, David witnesses a torrential rain outside his house. During this dream a young Aborigine appears and presents David with a triangular black stone bearing a totemic engraving of what appears to be a solar deity.

Taken by themselves, these sequences seem to indicate David's rapid mental deterioration, although the reasons for this breakdown are not clear. While David has a pleasant family life, things gradually become undone due to David's own obsessional behavior. His wife Anne's familiar claim "I don't know you anymore" takes on fuller meaning as the narrative comes to a close. David begins to view all of reality against the backdrop of his dreams. When his children let the bathtub overflow David stares for a moment with a child's bewildered fascination as a staircase becomes a natural waterfall. At various points David's life seems to be cracking

apart without evidence of some underlying pathology.

David's story would be annoyingly obscure were it not prefaced and encompassed by some scenes that give the film's crisis a broader dimension. A tiny Outback village is bombarded by a hailstorm in the middle of a bright, sunny day; children are herded into a schoolhouse as the teacher looks out the door with David's enthralled amazement. A black rain resembling oil falls on Sydney, causing much consternation for local newspeople and meteorologists. One recurring image is a long shot of Sydney under a black sky, oddly offset by a rainbow. The shot preceding all of these images is perhaps the most premonitory: an Aborigine (who later becomes important) sits alone on a rocky outcropping overlooking the desert, painting an object resembling the amulet David sees in his dream. On the cavern wall behind him are several apparently Aboriginal paintings, including one resembling a prehistoric animal, or perhaps a rocket ship or airplane.

All of these scenes underscore the film's delicate balancing of magic against physical reality, perception against occurrences external to individual experience. The sequences of the hailstorm and the black rain suggest that other people perceive the same impending doom that David sees approaching. These incidents are portrayed for the viewer in such a way as to remove them from any critical analysis; the storms are meant to appear mystical and predetermined, but without any connection to a clear schematic. The early scenes suggest that something is going wrong in the natural world, but the significance of these events changes as the focus shifts to the city and finally the individual (David). The atmosphere is thus handily established, with the issue being the attempt to test reason against forces that appear supernatural, yet are not associated with any

specific pattern of belief.

The body of the film concerns David's defense of Chris, a young Aborigine accused of killing another in a street brawl. For David, two things become apparent: the dead Aborigine was executed as part of a tribal ritual, and Chris is the Aborigine appearing in his dreams. David finds himself on a collision course with his own judicial system as he undertakes his defense of Chris. David is convinced that the murdered Aborigine had violated some tribal law, but the court rejects this defense since it contends that no city-dwelling Aborigine is tribal. By extension, there is a suggestion that tribal people are altogether extinct. David's problems are compounded as neither Chris nor any of the other Aborigines involved in the killing cooperate by revealing evidence of a tribal code. In the meantime David's hallucinations continue, and he begins to make connections between his own failing legal case and an oncoming personal calamity.

The murder case gradually fades from attention as David discovers it is he who is on trial. Chris and an old Aborigine named Charlie visit the Burtons' house one night; instead of getting advice from David, they explain tribal law and the concept of "dreamtime," the notion that dreams contain a spirit world that reveals what will take place in waking hours, and actually determines events of conscious experience. Dreamtime is seen by the Aborigines as the only authentic explanation of history itself. Anne Burton is distressed by the Aborigines, and David's family, except for his children, becomes alienated from him as he comes to believe: "Our dreams come back, and we don't know what they mean."

David consults an archeologist named Dr. Whitburn who also becomes David's psychiatrist as she reveals the significance of the black stone appearing in David's dream; it is connected to the ancient Aboriginal belief

in the Mulkurul, a race with exceptional prophetic powers and ties to dreamtime, whose appearance signals an apocalypse and a new cycle in time. At this thought David panics, since he, after all, had the dreams of Chris and the sacred stone, so it follows that he belongs to the Mulkurul. Alarmed, David visits Charlie, who lives in an utterly empty flophouse room in a destitute part of Sydney. David is still convinced that Charlie, as a respected member of the tribe, is also a shaman who can provide solutions. Charlie's only words to David are "Are you a fish? Are you a snake? Are you a man? Are you Mulkurul? Who are you?" The latter question turns into a chant (prayer?) as David sits mesmerized. It is clear now that what David saw as hatred and contempt aimed at the white oppressor and violator of customs is actually awe and fear. At the same time the younger Chris shows hostility for David's lack of self-awareness. Chris becomes a kind of guru for David, finally taking him to a sacred Aboriginal shrine under Sydney. There David discovers artifacts associated with the Mulkurul, including a mask that could be David's own deathmask. He leaves the shrine via a sewer culvert to end up on an open beach at dawn, where he witnesses the apocalypse in the form of an enormous tidal wave.

This is an infinitely complex film whose main stylistic could be called "enjambment." Seemingly contradictory lines of thought run together but eventually contribute to rather than detract from the synthesis the film achieves. On the most immediate level the film offers analysis of the failure of Western society and particularly its exploitation and cavalier destruction of other cultures. Yet the film re-examines certain Western beliefs and attempts to show their transcultural kinship with other societies. It seems ironic that Chris is named after the leader of one of the West's

primary religions, since Chris is totally alienated from white society and Western beliefs. The role of Chris's underground tribe, however, can be seen as comparable to the situation of the early Christians. Chris stands stoically in the Sydney courtroom like Christ before Pilate, making David and the other barristers conscious of the empty ritual they perform in their outdated and ill-fitting wigs and robes, emblems now bereft of all signification.

The role of the Aborigines is especially important not because of their position as an oppressed minority (David's colleague accuses him of knee-jerk liberalism in his paternalistic feeling toward Chris) but for their unique position as a symbol of human collective belief. This is conveyed photographically as Weir's camera concentrates on the brooding faces of the Aborigines, their prehistoric features reminding us that they signify original man and are therefore more conscious of the meaning of myth and ritual, and the whole notion of the cosmogony's repetition. After making this assertion the film does not aggrandize (or eulogize) the Aborigines, but suggests that prehistoric man was only the beginning of human intellectual and spiritual development. They appear in this narrative as apparitions from the past to re-orient the banal and moribund culture of the present. David (as portrayed by Richard Chamberlain) is in most respects a pathetic figure, made so because he is effete and unable to summon up the shamanistic power that could rejuvenate his own tribe.

The narrative does not treat the Aborigines solely as metaphors, robbing them of their human dignity, but instead implies that the "magic" the Aborigines offer is actually quite simple, and that the difficulty of white civilization is that its spiritual bankruptcy is so severe it can only wait passively (in typical Protestant manner) for Armageddon to occur.

More important, the apocalypse the film ultimately deals with suggests the final end of history rather than the regeneration of time found in primitive belief. Hence, the crisis depicted is a peculiarly Western crisis, with the assumption that Western man is now in the most precarious position, possessing enormous power yet capable of losing control of this power in a way that would actually bring about the end of the world.

The central problem is that Western civilization, in the person of David, has lost contact with mythic time and the power of myth as the foundation of belief. The film deftly shows evidence that this crisis is transpsychical, manifest in various forms. The incredible aspects of the film serve to enhance the sense of a need, for the fantastic, for the forces underneath primordial myth. But these elements also provide the allegory for a story of mental disintegration. In fact, mental crisis is portrayed as a symptom of the loss of spiritual belief. The elements of myth are shown to be what unite the collectivity and provide health to the individual and the group. Psychoanalysis and anthropology are again united to show that religion has therapeutic power sustaining civilization; conversely, intellectual processes are connected to the realm of the spirit.¹⁰

The collective nature of the crisis is the first focus of attention since the early scenes involve the community. The hailstorm disrupts the play of schoolchildren; when they are rushed back inside the classroom they are uncontrollable and inattentive to the commands of their teacher.

¹⁰This issue has been touched on in relation to the films in Chapter III. Lévi-Strauss and much of structural anthropology have demonstrated these intersections; some writing more explicit in its validating the consubstantiality of religion and psychoanalysis in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); see especially the chapter "Ways towards the Psychological Liberation of Man," pp. 291-308.

Pictures of various planets adorn the walls of the classroom and writings on the blackboard suggest a lesson on the cosmos was underway before the recess. The disruption of the class by the hailstorm suggests the first indication that the crisis is based on a general process of petrification and a fixation on the signifier (the attempt to render the cosmos in maps, charts and formulae). The intellectual method of the Enlightenment, suggesting the primacy of the subject, is first addressed in the hailstorm sequence. The storm itself rather than the class lecture captures the attention of the children. A piece of glass from a window shattered by the hail cuts one of the children, indicating that the terror of the cosmos is now too threatening to the inquisitive naivete of children stultified by the educational process.

Petrification is indicated in other early imagery, including the plastic head of a tiger in the emblem of a trucking company, and the picture of an orangutan on a poster for a local zoo; neither the cat nor the ape (nor nature itself) is in any sense "represented" by these signs. Interestingly, both of these images appear twice as part of David's recurring visions, connected to author/audience vision since their first appearance is without David as mediator. When Anne Burton tries to learn a bit more about the Aborigines she gives a cursory glance to a few textbooks. Books surround David as he falls asleep at his desk; boredom seems the only cure for his anxious insomnia. Petrification is also suggested when Anne diffidently shows her amateurish wildlife paintings to Chris and Charlie; Charlie politely compliments Anne.

The greatest instance of petrification is of course the trial of Chris. The ludicrous wigs and robes, reminders of the unremitting hold of British colonialism, are absurdly out of place in the modern decor of the

courtroom. The judicial seal behind the bench contains the words "Mon Roi et Mon Droit," the most powerful reminder of both Empire and the Enlightenment mind, the primacy of the subject and the subject's lawful right to effectuate power. The seal capsulizes the philosophical foundations of colonialism and capital. The courtroom procedure, the last vestige of sacrificial ritual¹¹ in Western culture, is shown to be empty of significance. Chris is not an adequate scapegoat since he is little threatened by the proceeding. He actually draws punishment upon himself in order to protect his tribe and a law more powerful than the one that needs resuscitation through the trial/scapegoating. The inefficacy of the trial as a ritual drawing society together is demonstrated in David's conflict with his peers, beginning with the colleague who charges that David's interest in the case shows his middle-class patronization of blacks, a charge revealing the colleague's own racism. The same colleague suggests that David plead bargain Chris and his friends to a lesser offense rather than plead them "not guilty," further proving the perversion and bankruptcy of the law.

Chris is a stoic witness to this petrification, best exemplified when he is interrogated by a berobed David in an empty holding room. The room has blank granite walls with water trickling through a crevice; Western civilization has turned to stone; nature has overtaken culture. Chris is emotionless when he places his hand on the red Bible in the courtroom. He is simply repeating the dull rote actions of Western man, perhaps recognizing that further repetition will hasten the collapse of these rituals and the civilization they support.

¹¹The relationship of the judicial system to mythic ritual is discussed in René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 23-24, *passim*.

The inefficacy of Western law is most apparent when Chris turns the tables on David by interrupting David's legal admonitions with: "You ...you are the one who's in trouble!" David is then told that he "doesn't know what dreams are anymore." During their dinner with the Burtons, Charlie and Chris had already reversed roles with the white men by turning a conversation about their testimony into an investigation of the unconscious mind. At this meeting Chris begins analyzing David's extraordinary dreams and explaining the concept of "dreamtime." Chris's explanation could be a page out of Jung or Lévi-Strauss. He says: "Dreams are shadows of something real." The dinner at the Burtons' home, this communion of two cultures, is the moment when the association between the spiritual world and the collective unconscious is made specific. The power of the unconscious mind to act as mediator between the spirit and physical reality was shown early on in the death of Jimmy, the young Aborigine terrified by his own violation of tribal law. David slowly begins to comprehend the unconscious mind as the matrix of law and all conscious experience, but his attitude is confused and despairing. He tells his stepfather: "I've lost the world I thought I had."

The connections between dreams, myth, and ritual remain unclear for David. The irony of his dilemma resides in his family history and his relationship with his stepfather, an Anglican minister. David's father claims that he has "spent a lifetime" examining the mysteries David pursues. David retorts angrily: "You explained them away!" Many of David's ancestors were clergymen, a fact brought out when David shows Chris and Charlie a family picture album. Chris and Charlie, like David, have a keen interest in the question of ancestry. As they browse through the aging photographs in the album there is the strong sense that the spiritual

quest of David's family remains locked in the past, enclosed in the mystery of the old photographs that fascinate David. Far from showing a snide contempt for David's ancestors and their religion, Chris and Charlie begin to see more evidence of a genuine spiritual heritage and special powers that are still a puzzle to David. In one remarkable sequence Charlie studies a photograph of one of the Burton ancestors. The image is of a man in a cassock standing in front of an ancient structure bearing a painting of a snake over its entrance. Charlie traces the snake with his finger. The same image of a snake appears later at the entrance to the sacred temple David finds under the city. Charlie asks David if his people come from "sunrise or sunset," the East or the West. David says his family came from South America. David also makes a point of saying that both his parents are dead, as if he wishes to sever his connection to the past in the eyes of Chris and Charlie at the same time that he celebrates it. David's guilt becomes important here; he abandoned a race of priests to become a lawyer. By so doing, he turned myth into narrative, causing a fall into profane time. The loss of the sacred world is synonymous with the suppression of the unconscious mind. David's torn psyche is apparent in his alternate nightmares and sleeplessness; as for Travis Bickle in Taxi Driver, insomnia is for David part of a pattern of flight from the unconscious.

David's meetings with Chris and Charlie confirm for him not only the importance of his dreams, but a special and terrible destiny. This destiny becomes more apparent when Dr. Whitburn explains to David the concept of the Mulkurul, the ancient race with close contact to dreamtime, who reappear before the repetition of the cosmogony. David's realization that he belongs to the Mulkurul is central to an interpretation of the story. The persecution of Chris and the Aborigines by Western law does not

suggest simply that Aboriginal law is purer or richer in mystery; such a proposition would be racist and miss the narrative's point. The crisis of the spirit is shown to be transcultural just as it is transpsychical, affecting all humanity. Anne Burton discovers that the image on the stone David sees in his dream resembles an Egyptian deity. The tomb behind David's ancestor in the photograph could be a Celtic ruin. The sacred temple underneath Sydney from a distance resembles Stonehenge, and the cosmogonic drawings on the temple walls resemble Celtic art, hieroglyphics, drawings of the American Indian, and prehistoric cave painting. The temple is a repository of world history, now confined to a sewer.

David's confrontation with his Mulkurul kinship, his true ancestry in a dead world, compares with a psychiatric patient's alternating acceptance and rejection of therapy. When Charlie asks David "Are you a fish?" (symbol of Christ), David answers in the negative. David also denies that he is a snake (symbol of the devil) or that he even belongs to the family of man. When David cautiously replies that he belongs to the Mulkurul, Charlie begins to chant in earnest, causing David to flee. The process of flight has been apparent in David from his first appearance in the narrative, and is portrayed primarily in the repetition-compulsion that controls his life. David is constantly involved in his work, even as this work frustrates him. The fact that his dreams keep recurring without a purgative effect indicates repetition-compulsion. His domesticity suggests another aspect of repetition, and Anne becomes a symbol of domesticity's repression of the unconscious when she attempts to apply guilt in order to pry David away from his self-discovery.

Images constantly appear representing the consequences of re-

pressing the unconscious mind, including images of urine and feces suggesting David's guilt-laden need to return to decomposed, primal matter and by so doing destroy his ego and intellect. The water from the overflowing bathtub in David's home has a strong association with urine as it spills slowly over the yellow carpet of the stairwell. While Anne moves quickly to clean up the mess the children caused (a mess delighting the children), David lingers at the bathtub, placing his hand near the drain, which is surrounded by toy houses and cars. David allows himself the brief sensual involvement with the water and the action of the drain; the drain becomes a primal orifice, especially as it threatens to suck in David's hand and the miniature world of the children's toys. The last image of water as symbol of David's repression appears when David races home to save his family from the torrential rain he foresaw in his dreams. The storm destroys the house. Walls crack open, trees smash through windows and doors, electrical wiring short-circuits, and ceilings cave in. David cannot locate Anne but picks up one of his children; he abandons her at the door when Chris appears to take David to the hidden temple.

Feces imagery is blatant when David and Chris approach the temple grounds. They must go underground, entering through a doorway to the sewer system marked: "Gas, Water, and Manproof--Keep the Door Closed at All Times." As they proceed farther into the earth, finally crawling on their stomachs, they pass another sign: "Danger--Raw Sewage." It may be suggested that the Aboriginal temple was built inside the sewer because the white man would never venture into anything so bleak, dirty, and threatening.¹² But such a reading would overlook the

¹²This has been touched on in Adrian Martin's discussion of *The Last Wave*, in *The New Australian Cinema* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1980), pp. 108-109.

level of what Borges would term "irreality" that the narrative has entered into. At this point the distinctions between vision and reality are deliberately vague. There can be little rational explanation for the shrine's untampered-with existence; it is more readily identifiable as the remains of the sacred world buried underneath Western man's fear of and preoccupation with death, signified by the shit to which David is reduced and in which he is immersed as he completes his self-recognition.

In the temple David discovers the ancient mask that is a duplicate of his own face. Just as he makes this discovery Charlie (or a ghost of Charlie) appears in menacing ritual garb and body paint. David kills Charlie with the same stone he saw in his dream and flees with the mask, which he accidentally drops in the water. The murder of Charlie and the loss of the mask signify David's mental breakdown and his loss of contact with sacred time. He is literally excreted onto the beach, which is littered with trash and garbage. He kneels in the tide majestically, as if to take part in a new baptism, but he looks up helplessly as the tidal wave ends, in the best Kermodian fashion, his life, the world, and the film.

As suggested, the linear view of time eventually asserted demonstrates that the cosmogony cannot be recapitulated according to ancient and primitive beliefs. Western civilization has destroyed the innocence making that belief system possible, along with its own mythology. The presence of Chris is the one optimistic aspect of the narrative, primarily because Chris violates tribal law and sacrifices himself to take David to the temple. The special power Chris intuits in David is the power of humanity to confirm its contract with the sacred. Chris seems to understand that the Aboriginal belief system is incomplete, that mysteries still remain to be uncovered. During his trial testimony Chris states: "The law is more

important than man," affirming law as a unifying principle and the essence of the sacred contract. Yet Chris's decision to break the law to help David in his quest recalls Christ's remark: "The Law was made for man, not man for the Law."

The view of the film then is tragic, since David is unable to fulfill his role, to become a messiah, to use the gifts given him to make the apocalypse a positive moment. There is some irony in the compatibility of the primitive cosmogony with the Western notion of the inevitability of disaster, inevitability best demonstrated in David's repression and psychic torment. The repression within Western life, accentuated by religion itself, destroys humanity's consubstantiality with God, making civilization open to gods who are arbitrary and capricious. Dreams do not confer power on David; rather, they condemn him to impotence. The fact that David as a child dreamed repeatedly of his mother's death did not change the fact of her death. The very notion of dream-as-premonition is meant to confirm the sacred power of the shaman, but David is a somnambulist wandering repeatedly through the tragedy and devastation of his dreams. While Chris is awestruck by David (the hint of progress Western civilization once represented), he knows that David's existence augurs ill for the human race. Humanity now stands helpless in the face of the apocalypse. The very concept of the last wave suggests that God is violating his own contract not to destroy the earth with water, as occurred in the story of Noah. (We are reminded of the premonitory rainbow appearing in the dark sky over Sydney.) The last wave leaves open the question that the god who rules is not the one of the Judeo-Christian heritage, or, since the iconography of this tradition is so prominent in the film, that the apocalypse is indeed the revenge so long projected by Western man,

appearing now to confirm the spiritual void that civilization has created. The mythical unity seen in the existence of the Mulkurul is shown to be a myth in the pejorative sense. The fabled union of East and West, the transcultural bond of humanity, is a vision destroyed as civilization has destroyed the nature of myth. Part of Chris's fear of the Mulkurul may be, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, the transmutation of myth into narrative. At best, David's self-recognition may provide him with knowledge, but this "naming" of the myth within his unconscious has no benefit for the collectivity.

The Last Wave shows its relevance to the apocalypse of the horror film by its yoking of the unconscious to the supernatural in a way that masks or "explains away" neither. The horror that the film identifies is the helplessness of modern civilization as it stares at the marvelous and the terrible without having a relationship to them. The Last Wave shows differently than Mad Max human reversion to barbarism, since "civilized" humanity has regressed to a pitiable stage through the most sophisticated belief systems. This regression does not suggest a Dionysian union with the cosmos, nor even an amphibian crawling out of the muck, but rather Adam rendered invalid by his immediate divorce from a spiritual destiny.

III

For all of the aesthetic flaws focused on by critics at its release in 1979, there is little question that Apocalypse Now is a pivotal American film. If only by virtue of its use as a reference point for describing other films and cultural phenomena, Coppola's film is a remarkable cultural artifact. Intertextual analysis of this film is necessary as it leaps the boundaries of genre categorization on an on-going basis, discovers new

audiences, separates itself from the specific issue (Vietnam) it addresses to become important to other types of discourse, and enters into a wide-ranging discussion of the nature of apocalyptic consciousness in mass society and post-modern art. Quibbling about the relationship of the film to genres such as the horror film seems a fruitless task; the current form of Apocalypse Now's presentation as horror and cult film¹³ obviates discussion of the theme of descent into madness, the relevance of the station play and Expressionism, the disjointed nature of the film's universe, and the final confrontation with a "monster."

The early criticism of the film's strained intellectualism and awkward homages to respected high art overlooked the fact that the film's flaws are located very much in the contradictions and anxiety of the works which are the subject of this homage. While most of the writings on Apocalypse Now to date have done a successful job of validating or refuting the film's

¹³For a number of months the 8th St. Playhouse, one of New York's more popular repertory cinemas, has offered Apocalypse Now on its mid-night bill, alternating with such films as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and The Rocky Horror Picture Show. The quasi-mystical aspect of the midnight cult film and its importance as totemic object to a demoralized youth culture is discussed (superficially) in Stuart Samuels, Midnight Movies (New York: Collier Books, 1983). (Interestingly, Samuels's book, like Dick Hebdige's book on the punk rock subculture, attempts to explain a whole tendency of art in terms of apocalypse.)

A discussion of Apocalypse Now as cult film is a subject for another study. Suffice it to say that while this film has found a more mainstream audience that acknowledges its importance to the history of American cinema and as a comment on Vietnam, another audience shows interest primarily in an aspect of its spectacle. Like 2001, Apocalypse Now seems to be a work whose intellectual issues take, for some audiences, a back seat to style and effects; Apocalypse Now is the horrific "bad trip" as opposed to the "ultimate trip" of 2001 that fascinated youth audiences in the psychedelic, cosmic-oriented and optimistic '60s. The modern audience may see Apocalypse Now as a focal point for a concelebration of an horrific apocalypse that replaces the forward-looking revelation of Kubrick's film.

connections to literary sources,¹⁴ few if any critiques have perceived how Coppola's amalgamation and updating of The Golden Bough, The Waste Land, Heart of Darkness and the myths of journey and recovery relate to the cultural milieu surrounding the film's production.

More significant to an appreciation of Apocalypse Now may be the comment referred to in Chapter II concerning this film, along with The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, as evidence of a societal "collusion in the face of triumphant barbarism."¹⁵ Whereas the barbarism of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is based on the explosion of the frontier myth and the civilizing restraints of that experience, Apocalypse Now embarks on an outright analysis of the factors beneath the death of the American mythos in the end-of-history atmosphere of the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, "crisis of democracy" period. Like The Last Wave, Apocalypse Now projects a collective guilt for the disruption of myth and accepts a necessary self-immolation as penance for this failure. The conflicting ideologies under the film's production--the right-wing beliefs of screenwriter John Milius and the liberal, counterculture orientation of Coppola--deny any ideological reevaluation of the death of myth and of the failure of the charismatic hero that form the text of the film. This sense of contradiction is sensed by Coppola himself. Willard's refusal of the king's sceptre acknowledges the progressive Movement sentiments that con-

¹⁴A few representative examples are John Tessitore, "The Literary Roots of Apocalypse Now," The New York Times, 21 October 1979, Section D, p. 21; Marsha Kinder, "The Power of Adaptation in Apocalypse Now," Film Quarterly 2 (Winter 1979-80):12; and Diane Jacobs, "Coppola Films Conrad in Vietnam," in Michael Klein and Gillian Parker, eds., The English Novel and the Movies (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981), p. 211. Perhaps the most illuminating article is Garrett Stewart, "Coppola's Conrad: The Repetitions of Complicity," Critical Inquiry 3 (Spring 1981): 455.

¹⁵I have referred to Andrew Britton's remark appearing in Movie 27/28 (Winter 1980/Spring 1981):13.

fronted the Vietnam predicament, but by the end of the film "everyone is insane."¹⁶ Again, apocalypse is born out of the sense of the inevitable. More than most apocalyptic works, Apocalypse Now acknowledges historical processes and the contradictions of dominant ideology, but ultimately sticks with the horror film and representational cinema overall by viewing these contradictions as endemic to human character.

Like The Exorcist, Apocalypse Now is a cinema of effects, particularly in its use of effects to overwhelm the spectator with the basic premise of the inevitability of collapse. The film's lasting value may be in the hybrid nature of its form and the deconstruction its overlapping of genres necessarily undertakes. More significant is how the deconstruction of the war film, the epic, film noir, and the horror film is conjoined to the cultural sources of the death of the hero and the revitalization of society. A discussion of this deconstruction as constituting the aspect of the work as metapolitical cultural document seems sensible as a way of prefacing any comment on the film's narrative.

The journey of Martin Sheen (the "new James Dean"¹⁷) to meet

¹⁶Coppola makes this remark in Greil Marcus, "Journey up the River," Rolling Stone, 1 November 1979, p. 56.

¹⁷Martin Sheen has stated forthrightly the influence Dean had on him as a youngster and the continuing influence the Dean persona has on his acting style. See Jean Vallely, "Martin Sheen: Heart of Darkness, Heart of Gold," in *Ibid.*, p. 49. There can be no greater validation of intertextual analysis than Sheen's performance in Terence Malick's Badlands, where he portrayed a character strongly modelled on mass-murderer Charles Starkweather. Starkweather himself had a fixation on Dean, a fact that became part of Starkweather's mythology and a component of the equation used by popular journalism to explain his pathology. Sheen's performance makes the Starkweather-Dean association plausible from a narrative standpoint but, more importantly, in the context of the film it emphasizes cinema's need to revive its own legends. The poster art for Badlands pictures Sheen with his hands draped over a shotgun that rests across his shoulders, duplicating James Dean's famous "crucifixion pose" from the publicity material for Giant. Thus we have Sheen/Dean/Starkweather as savior-martyr. As an additional note, Sheen led a group of pilgrims to Dean's grave on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the actor's death in an auto crash.

Brando, the overarching presence whose personal mystique and legendary star quality give a galvanizing force to Frazer's ideas recognizable by the current audience, must be understood within the film's cultural context. Conceived in the late 1960s, the film is explicitly not Paradise Now, that attempt to reinstate into theatrical experience the spirit of art as religious ritual of the ancient world. Apocalypse Now suggests that the Dionysian spontaneity of late '60s culture constituted not a revolution, but a fixation on the superstructural aspects of the "American rebelliousness" for which Carter eulogized Elvis Presley. The discovery of a Brando no longer the Adonis concretizes the Fisher King. A cultural fixation and a creation of culture, the star figure of Brando is now alternately ridiculed and lamented, deprived of basic humanity as myth is deconstructed without an attendance to the ideological factors underneath this specific cult of personality. Along with the revisionist biographies of Kennedy and Elvis Presley,¹⁸ the ridicule of the continued presence of a dissipated Brando signifies the impossibility of the "fallen rebel" myth, particularly as the falling star/hero is treated with derision and mockery (e.g., in gossip magazines and "people" segments of news broadcasts). The end of the rebel heroes in turn signifies the condition of faded ideals in late '70s-early '80s society, with the suggestion that rebellion is constituted chiefly

¹⁸The attack on the hero, an attack further deifying the hero by denying his humanity and separating him from a political/historical process, is a predominant aspect of current revisionist biography. Representative examples are Garry Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1981), and Albert Goldman, Elvis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981). Goldman's book actually mentions Frazer in a discussion of Presley's decline, but shows no self-consciousness of its own enterprise in a broad cultural project of deconstructing (and destroying) the hero. The usually scurrilous tone of the revisionist biography--a tone the author attempts to mask by the accumulation of data and the authority of research--most often indicates not only the author's reactionary temperament, but his/her denial of history and the full scope of ideology in producing and debunking the hero.

in the cult of style represented by these figures. The demonizing of the hero in revisionist biography, far from deconstructing myth, refuses to examine the individual in an historical context, and relies wholly on the devices of myth to take a different tactic by suggesting that we as a people were foolish to allow such individuals to embody collective fantasies. The star figure is forced to self-destruct, undercutting whatever value the charismatic personality has in signifying a period of historical change, as the idea of the hero is continually co-opted by capital to deflate the importance of an individual concept or personality as embodiment of a spirit of social transformation.

The contradictions underneath the creation of charismatic figures by industry are the same contradictions addressed in the film's narrative. Although the film has been denounced for its casual gloss of the politics of Vietnam,¹⁹ its text is involved entirely in ideological questions concerning America in the 1960s; its difficulties may be the difficulties in reconciling Lévi-Strauss with Marx, but Apocalypse Now succeeds at a limited level in demonstrating how a nation's mythic self-conception is tied to its ideology, and how the failure of ideology coincides with the disappearance of myth. This is not to say that the cause-effect relationship between myth and ideology is addressed in the film, nor is a firm ideological position carefully elaborated. This elaboration is not achieved perhaps because of a tension in the film between presenting very forthrightly its major intellectual premises, and relying heavily on the techniques of traditional Hollywood representational cinema to convey these premises.

Nevertheless, the theme of the hero's death gives Apocalypse Now

¹⁹See Deirdre English, "The Dark Heart of Apocalypse Now: Telling it like it Wasn't," Mother Jones (September/October 1979):34, and Richard Grenier, "Coppola's Folly," Commentary (October 1979):67.

an intellectual resonance that makes more compelling its approach to the Vietnam debacle. The scapegoat rituals of the film and the foregrounding of the texts of Frazer, Weston, Eliot, and Conrad, if they are to be understood at all, must be perceived as part of the investigation of the failure of American myth and ritual. The death of the hero, again a topic of much popular and scholarly discourse, is presented in this film explicitly as part of a controlling national geist and makes the audience conscious of Vietnam chiefly as another arena for the acting-out of American ritual or, rather, as the final point of displacement for a mythic past. In this film the theme of the hero's death is conveyed with the anxiety associated with the role of myth in culture. The death of the hero is meant to signify another pessimistic, non-revelatory apocalypse, but an apocalypse in the full sense of its current understanding. The death of the hero suggests an end to history, but not a Nietzschean end pointing to the birth of the New Man or the regeneration of time, nor a Marxian end permitting a consciousness of a non-mythic view of history. Apocalypse Now is a realization of Lawrence's apocalypse-as-wish-fulfillment insofar as it suggests a self-immolation when history is no longer able to convey meaning or symbolic values. In this Apocalypse Now may be seen by many as a reactionary work, but as a representation of the limits ideology places on a perception of myth and how, in fact, these limits suggest also the contradictions and subsequent defeat of ideology rendered mythically, this is an important work of art.

The relevance of myth and ritual to the contemporary scene is conveyed as the film opens in medias res with Willard's nightmare hallucination of the burning Asian jungle. Willard's wan face is superimposed on the flames; the face is upside-down to portray immediately the narra-

tive's basic sense of a world out of joint.²⁰ Willard's presence and his first-person narration connects him to a line of apocalyptic narrators from St. John to the narrators of Gabriel García Márquez;²¹ the telling of the tale coincides with the movement of history, and the end of the text marks the end of time. Like St. John, Willard is a mythical narrator, since the events of the film have already happened and Willard tells his story from mythic time. There is no suggestion, however, that Willard is proposing a code for the rest of humanity to follow, since the film does not offer any conclusions about Willard's fate nor does it imply that Willard's personal crisis has been resolved. Willard resigns himself to be "the caretaker of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz's memory," the repository of the history of a dead world.

The apocalypse-in-microcosm is seen as Willard begins his process of self-destruction after the dream of the burning jungle. He sets fire to a picture of his wife and loses himself in alcohol and tortured ruminations about his own self-worth. Willard's crisis is concerned with more than the alienation of the veteran. The supplementation of the inferno sequence with the Doors' famous song "The End" (which now seems, along with the rest of Jim Morrison's work, a dark mythic eulogy for a generation) enhances the mythic dimension of the film and puts the character of Willard in a broader historical context. The famous Oedipal sequence of "The End" ("The killer awoke before dawn...") and the lines

²⁰Noël Carroll mentions this in "Language and Cinema: Preliminary Notes for a Theory of Verbal Images," Millennium Film Journal 7/8/9 (Fall/Winter 1980-81):187.

²¹Lois P. Zamora offers an analysis of Márquez as apocalypticist that is useful in illuminating Coppola's handling of the narrator. See Zamora's "The Myth of Apocalypse and Human Temporality in García Márquez's Cien años de soledad and El otoño del patriarca," Symposium 32 (Winter 1978):341.

lost in a Roman wilderness
 of pain and all the children
 are insane waiting for the
 summer rain

effect another transformation of the Age of Aquarius by showing the entrapment of this generation by the repetitions described by both Frazer and Freud. The lines "desperately in need of some stranger's hand... in a desperate land" evoke the Grail myth in the late '60s context; this evocation is compelling since the hero's inability to respond to his mandate suggest another form of entrapment by myth. This entrapment is hypothesized in Willard's confinement in the Saigon hotel room and his mental disintegration. He is overwrought by the idea that "every minute Charlie squats in the bush he gets stronger" while Willard grows weaker living the life of an ordinary middle-class citizen, a life he now sees as an imprisonment. He destroys his connections to family and country when he says "When I was home there was nothing."

The crisis of the film is established in Willard's early scene. Willard is a hip moralist--another incarnation of James Dean--but he is also a soldier. He is a soldier, however, fixated only on a personal code of self-discipline, on warfare as self-discovery. His despair immediately posits a separation of culture from the rituals it generates, a disjunction between signifier and signified. Willard's martial arts practice turns into the emotionally purgative rehearsal exercises of performance art, exercises which purge very little since they do not center on the cause of illness. Willard would rather smash a mirror than dissolve into narcissism, but the wound resulting from the damage further signifies repetition of the self-destruction based on an inflated and directionless self-image. Willard gauges his value only in his ability to perform his military role, but his self-expectations are no longer grounded in the common code of a society.

He says "Everyone gets everything he wants," suggesting a total faith either in consumer democracy or in the beneficence of the gods, but then he says "I wanted a mission, and for my sins they gave me one." When two soldiers come to take Willard to Intelligence Headquarters he inquires "What are the charges?" Far from believing that the freedom of life will give him everything he wants, Willard, like Travis Bickle, is overcome by guilt based on his own sense of inadequacy, making him ready for victimization at the hands of the CIA and Army officials at Nha Trang.

At I-Corps Headquarters the disjunction between signifier and signified is made pronounced as Willard simultaneously affirms and denies his role as CIA assassin: "I am not aware of such operations and would not be at liberty to discuss them if they did exist." The Trang officials interpret this as a "yes." They in turn tell Willard that the plot to assassinate Kurtz "does not exist, nor will it ever exist." The contradictions of dominant ideology are spelled out quickly by this conversation, which neatly capsulizes the workings of the clandestine power structure and its ability actually to transform past, present, and future. By controlling information through disinformation, the power structure destroys language (Willard's order to "terminate [Kurtz] with extreme prejudice"). Willard's luncheon with General Corman and Jerry, the CIA agent, further enunciates the contradictions of ideology. While the General's luncheon of roast beef and shrimp laid out on neat linen and china ("a bite to eat") is a typical symbol of upper middle-class comfort and complacent ease ("Let's pass the food both ways to save time"), the meal conveys alienation rather than communion. Willard senses that he is being inspected, his every word analyzed. The camera focuses on his hand gingerly holding a table knife, the same hand the rulers expect him to use for murder.

The General plays Willard the tape of Kurtz's garbled transmission.

Kurtz could be reading poetry when he says

We must incinerate them, pig after pig, cow after cow...
and they call me an assassin...what do you call it when the
assassins start accusing the assassins?

But for the Nha Trang officials the tape is simply evidence that Kurtz is "insane." The standards for evaluating mental health are not clear, however, even as Willard feels coerced to go along with the judgment: "Yes sir, obviously insane sir." Willard, the true intellectual, must put up with the condescending manner and intellectual posturing of the "enlightened" General Corman ("Well, you see Willard..."). The General does not psychoanalyze Kurtz; he quotes Lincoln and speculates about how "the good side of man's nature does not always triumph." Kurtz's failure is an individual failure, divorced from any historical process. The tape recording is sufficient evidence to suggest to the officials not that Kurtz has committed unusual crimes, but that he is surfacing as a symptom of an illness that threatens to reveal, as Willard terms it, "the whole circus." The traditional maxim often quoted by figures of power that America is a "nation of laws, not men" is violated in this scene. Willard's order to kill an American officer flies in the face of such wisdom, evidencing still further the breakup of a code. During this scene the director has Martin Sheen violate the frame (much as Travis Bickle did in Taxi Driver) as Willard stares into the camera to register for the audience its incorporation into the crisis.

Willard quickly identifies with the scapegoating of Kurtz ("his voice on the tape really put the hook in me"). Willard's connections to Kurtz have been made apparent from the beginning of the film; the opening scene of the burning jungle contains images of the conclusion that become

clearer with repeated viewings. The connection is obvious as the journey to the renegade Kurtz's outpost becomes for Willard a journey into the shared personality of himself and Kurtz. Willard continually examines Kurtz's dossier as he sits perspiring on the deck of the PBR; the Vietnam War often evades him as it totally evades the boat's stoned-out crew. Willard recognizes Kurtz as the heart of his self-discovery, the river on which he journeys "a main circuit cable plugged straight into Kurtz."

Enough has been written on the theme of contradiction informing every detail of the film (Lance taking drugs; homefront luxuries; rock and roll in a different culture; the army's destruction rather than "rescue" of the population²²); of issue here is how the film exposes the mythic apparatus of war. Most significant is how the confrontation between Willard and Kurtz and the implementation of the Fisher King myth address the question of the failure of mythic belief. The crisis of the film can be easily recognized as Girard's "sacrificial crisis" where a society's rituals no longer serve the purpose of displacing violence and reaffirming a common code. The specific apocalypse of the film is bourgeois society's refusal to recognize the onset of chaos and its attempts to keep reinstated the same fragmented code and reactivated the same worn-out mechanism. Col. Kilgore is a demonic rather than Kubrick-style parodical figure when we recognize that the Air Cavalry in Vietnam did wear the antiquated hats, neckerchiefs, and blow the same bugle calls of Bull Run and the Little Big Horn. The attempt to keep displacing American violence in activities that are bereft of mythic value, unable to unify society, forms the horror of

²²Some of these details are discussed in my "Operation Mind Control: Apocalypse Now and the Search for Clarity," Journal of Popular Film and Television 1 (Spring 1980): 34.

the film. As if by osmosis Kilgore attempts to assume through the signification of hat, sunglasses, and foulard the characteristics of legendary military leaders. But one form of signification undercuts another. Kilgore's surfer T-shirt destroys the authority of his hat; Patton's camaraderie with his troops is transformed into Kilgore's homoerotic banter with his men around a barbecue, as distinctions of rank dissolve while class distinctions remain intact. Kilgore is a sadistic pederast whose "love for his boys" necessitates their willingness to sacrifice themselves to satisfy his vanity. Willard recognizes Kilgore's insane military tactics, but remains confused as to why the rulers would condemn Kurtz for "insanity and murder" while ignoring Kilgore. A gradual process is needed for Willard to realize that power can absorb all manner of insanity so long as it doesn't contradict or reveal the true nature of power.

Willard's discovery is fragmentary. He learns about Kurtz through official dossiers, Newsweek articles, departmental memoranda. This "education" of Willard is fitting for several reasons. Willard discovers how the power structure can alternately lionize and victimize one of its own; as the situation becomes more unstable, the crisis is seen as imminent and the rules become increasingly arbitrary. As the destruction of the code occurs the call for victims also increases. Willard's survey of Kurtz's dossier also suggests his separation from the "total picture" and the ability of power to mediate knowledge of a crucial aspect of social crisis just as it mediates all knowledge. An example of this mediation on a different scale is the Hau Phat stage show with Bill Graham and the Playmates. Here the theatre of war is transformed into pure spectacle, a media "happening." The Hau Phat show is the opposite of theatre since it foments rather than discharges emotion. Instead of unifying the group

around a common idea, it instills a greater sense of chaos. The Playmates tempt and tease the G.I.s with the offer of something that is immediately withdrawn, which propels the soldiers into more obscenities and outrage, causing internecine fights, the perfect emblem of the vicious circle of consumerism. The distance between the spectacle itself (with its lack of language or any expression beyond the flaunting of sex) and the spectacle's intended audience suggests the remoteness of this event from any form of communication. Like a TV game show host, huckster Bill Graham is unctuous and solicitous of "all you guys who worked so goddamn hard on Operation Brute Force," only to register disgust when his show goes awry, confronting him with a possible commercial disaster. The violent obscenities shouted by the G.I.s and the tension of this scene suggest not just the failure of this form of spectacle but the unconscious rejection of what is to be worshipped and defended. The Playmate of the Year, escorted by two Green Berets, is the Whore of Babylon, an emblem not so much of the exploitation of woman by dominant ideology (although she is literally put on a pedestal by the G.I.s) as of the cumulative vulgarity and corruption of American culture. The violence of the G.I.s' response seems natural; it suggests a deeply-rooted need to strike back, to consume, to obliterate all the aspects of the American dream used carrot-and-stick fashion to tease the middle-class.

Mediation also occurs in the appearance of a TV news team at the Air Cavalry landing zone. The newsman (director Coppola) tells Willard to "keep moving--don't look at the camera--act like you're fighting." There is no irony in the media becoming orchestrators of ideological conflict, actually assuming the role of military figures. For the TV reporter the actuality of the Vietnam conflict is not as important

as the ability to transmit a certain image, to reassure America that a code is still intact. This small scene, which leaves Willard slack-jawed, is the best example of the disjunction between signifier and signified. The signified is erased completely as reality is transformed through mediation; Willard could possibly ignore the TV team as an organization performing a specific propaganda role, but the posturing of Kilgore then suggests to him the pathology underneath the support of this mediation, the constant attempt to prop up a failing sign system.

The larger symbols of mediation are, of course, the battle sequences, first involving the helicopter attack on the village, and later the arrival of the PBR at Do Lung Bridge. Kilgore uses Wagner to "scare hell out of the slopes" in a psychological warfare operation. The Vietnamese are more afraid of the bombs and rockets than "The Ride of the Valkyries," which only gives them an early warning of the attack. Kilgore says his boys love the music, suggesting that this along with rock and roll is supposed to be a morale boost similar to the function of martial music in earlier periods. Morale seems hardly in question as Kilgore's "boys" merely sit in the helicopters and discuss surfing as technology does all the work; one soldier says "I'm not going, I'm not going!" when the helicopters land.

Rock and roll is especially significant at Do Lung Bridge as a symbol of disjunction and the aestheticizing of war. Lance, Clean, and Chef, three members of Willard's PBR crew, have been listening to or singing rock songs constantly as they drop acid and pills and smoke pot; Lance describes the holocaust at Do Lung as "beautiful." The bridge sequence itself, with strung lights and hurdy-gurdy music on the soundtrack, is the most evident literalization of the war-as-circus theme.

The collision of images and the failure of language is pronounced when Willard confronts a company of black soldiers stranded in a trench, firing wildly at an unseen enemy. The company is without any command, totally removed from any understanding of the war except the necessity of survival. One soldier named Roach has a black power symbol and an American flag next to a cassette player blaring a Jimi Hendrix recording, another example of the co-option of radical and counterculture movements by ideology. Roach wears a tooth necklace and warpaint and has an almost supernatural ability with a grenade launcher. He is a foreshadowing of the man Kurtz envisions as able to "utilize primordial instincts" to kill.

The spectacle of the Vietnam War does not divert the viewer from the central issue of the hero's descent. Willard's attempt to decipher the madness around him gives a new inflection to the Wasteland myth as the hero questions himself and his purpose enroute to the regenerative event. Willard, the journeying hero, sees that the displacement of American violence onto Vietnam has not worked in the way that previous armed conflicts have united the populace. Vietnam, seen through the eyes of the hero, is a scrapyard of the American unconscious, signified by the shards of jet planes, remains of helicopters entwined in trees, and the scenes at Hau Phat and the Do Lung Bridge, where the excesses of American culture suggest the source of collective demoralization. Willard's journey to murder Kurtz would seem to be, according to the Fisher King myth reasserted at the film's conclusion, a means of providing clarity and restoring cultural vitality. Willard assumes that Kurtz possesses a secret that will help with a decoding of the chaos surrounding and within Willard's mind. The Grail myth, after all, sometimes contains the theme of the revitalization of the king through a dialogue he undertakes with the hero.

One question here is how the film characterizes Kurtz as king and Vietnam as emblem of America, the Wasteland. The centrality of Kurtz to the narrative makes his "kingship" rather obvious, but his symbolic value is emphasized by the whole notion that he (as the General says) is "outstanding, a good humanitarian man," and by the crazed photojournalist's assertion that Kurtz is "a poet-warrior in the classical sense." Indeed, many of Kurtz's comments read by Willard summon up the image of the classical warrior who sees a simultaneous responsibility to self, the nation-state, and culture. Kurtz also asserts traditional soldierly values, exemplified by his letter to his son, wherein he explains and justifies the morality and logic of his actions (the assassination of Vietcong double agents) against the hypocrisy of the structure that has censured his actions and ordered his arrest. As Willard tries to understand Kurtz's logic, he is for a time confused that such a representative figure of American power should be transformed into a criminal for whom a death warrant is issued. Willard notes that Kurtz "was being groomed for one of the top slots in the corporation" (making a close equation here between the military and corporate culture). Willard begins to understand why Kurtz "split from the whole fucking program" only when he begins to perceive the inconsistencies within the conduct of the war and its inevitable failure as a means of producing something positive for America. There is a note of unease in Kilgore's remark after the napalm bombardment that "Someday this war is gonna end." Willard says that "For Charlie there were just two ways home...victory or death."

Willard does not concern himself with the specific political issues of the war as he approaches Kurtz since he senses a much deeper crisis, one on a mythic and psychic level. His comment on Kilgore's remark sug-

gests his knowledge that the American effort in Vietnam, far from restoring any stability to the collective psyche, has become a form of repetition compulsion. Like a marching band on Veterans' Day constantly replaying the same tunes, the immersion in violence--which previously had a specific signifying function--is believed by Kilgore and others to forestall a confrontation with the bankruptcy of their moral position. Willard begins to comprehend that it is not Kurtz's conflict with authority over war policy that has caused his scapegoating, but his intuition of the bankruptcy the society wants to keep hidden with its depleted rituals.

As the PBR comes closer to Kurtz's compound, the sense of disintegration increases. The Mark Twain image of young men taking a trip on the river dissolves as one by one the crew is wiped out. Chief, the black captain of the PBR, is given a funeral by the acid-head Lance in a grim answer to Leslie Fiedler's analysis of the Jim-Huck Finn motifs of American literature. At the same time Willard tears up the pictures of Kurtz, the mediated image of the person whose identity Willard has almost totally incorporated within himself. As the boat approaches the compound, references to American history and recent American culture are supplanted by images of civilization's primeval origins. Rows of charred crosses festoon a beach: Christianity is associated with a barbaric history, or perhaps with its encumbrance by barbaric institutions like the Ku Klux Klan that dissolve religion into superstition. The boat also passes a pyramid of skulls,²³ an altar suggesting what Chef later terms Kurtz's "pagan idolatry." The totemic arrangement of the skulls merely hyperbolizes not only the end-product of America's interventionism, but the final defeat of

²³The shot seems almost a homage to Richard Slotkin's scholarship. See the last chapter of his Regeneration through Violence (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

its last attempts at regeneration through violence.

Kurtz, we discover, is the corpse at the top of the pyramid, the last emblem of violent regeneration partially redeemed by his self-consciousness. When Willard arrives at the compound his anxiety is increased not so much by his confrontation with even more excessive carnage, but with his increased uneasiness about the purpose of his role and the possibility that Kurtz can provide explanation and closure to the agony he has endured. It seems as if the evil of American civilization has drained down into the cesspool of the compound. Dennis Hopper's crazed photographer works not as a realization of the mad Russian who announces the wonder of Conrad's Kurtz, but as an emblem of the remains of the origins of American youth culture. (It seems sensible that this fringe figure from the era of James Dean should greet the arrival of the "new" Dean and act as fool for a debilitated Brando.) The photojournalist also evokes Sean Flynn, son of the late movie actor, who disappeared in Southeast Asia while covering the war; this added conjuncture of Hollywood Babylon and Vietnam, the Hemingwayesque romance of war with its possibilities of new identity, is exposed in the Hopper character's psychosis. The photojournalist evokes more specifically Charles Manson (whose image appeared fleetingly earlier in the film) as he weaves a bizarre, synthetic cosmology having little to do with Kurtz, the charismatic figure the journalist claims "enlarged [his] mind."

Kurtz's relationship to the photojournalist is useful to understanding the resolution of Willard's journey. The photojournalist babbles on about the new world-view exposed to him by his guru:

...and that's dialectics, man, I mean something is or it isn't--
you go to the moon, what are you gonna land on? Fractions?
Two-fifths, three-quarters, three-eighths?

Kurtz shouts "You mutt!" at the photojournalist and heaves a volume of Eliot at him after reading a passage from "The Hollow Men." The figure of the 1960s spiritual guru is manifest in the photojournalist's veneration of Kurtz, indeed, in the worship of Kurtz by most of the seemingly autistic residents of the compound, including Colby, the ex-Green Beret so overcome by Kurtz's power he writes his wife "Sell the house...I'm never coming back." Kurtz's followers may be said to abandon America to follow him for the same reasons the youth generation of the '60s dropped out of mainstream life. Sensing a period of spiritual fallowness and corruption, the Kurtz followers seek out a charismatic figure whose real ideas never actually connect or cannot be communicated in the first place. The insanity evident in the photojournalist and Colby suggests that they are attempting to adopt Kurtz's personality since they have no personalities of their own. Their refusal to acknowledge Kurtz's humanity causes them to accept the most horrendous excesses of their guru's revenge on the civilization he has abandoned. Kurtz, like his cult followers, is simply an extension of the displacement process. If we acknowledge that Vietnam is simply another American battleground and a metaphor of the American cultural vacuum, the status of Kurtz as charismatic figure becomes clearer.

Kurtz's power over others seems located in his ability to perceive accurately the contradictions of American civilization while simultaneously being a vivid, singular incarnation of those contradictions, an icon of American excess and hubris well-realized in Brando's bloated figure. While Kurtz's followers assume that he possesses the key to the Way, Kurtz himself, burdened and sickly, dreams nostalgically of a millennial kingdom in the American past--a gardenia plantation on the

Ohio River, "a bit of heaven fallen on the earth." Oddly, the photo-journalist sees Kurtz's disability. He tells the imprisoned Willard: "You ...he wants you because you're alive." Kurtz's acute perceptions do not negate the fact that he is the embodiment of a dead civilization. Kurtz's connections to this past world, his belief in an older logic, military virtues, and "primordial" violence constitute the real basis of his charisma. The irony of Kurtz's dilemma is that he is unable to replace the old vision with a new one, to offer a program against the new, alien technocracy that has destroyed the Edenic dream. He would not be as foolish as Kilgore to try to reinstate the symbols of an antiquated past, but he is as ideologically naive. It is hard to accept that this brilliant strategist could not gain an overview of the power structure's Vietnam policy. Kurtz's perception of the ruling policy per se is probably not the issue.

Kurtz's famous speech about his witnessing the murder of children during his Green Beret period is key to his dilemma. His attempt to enter "primordial" time and invoke its violence shows his ahistorical interpretation of events. An understanding of the policies behind armed conflict is replaced by an assertion of the individual "will." The notion of the will-to-power supplements Kurtz's call for primordial violence; like the Nazis, Kurtz believes in summoning up the gods of a metaphysical past, a buried history that will rejuvenate the present. The "lying morality" Kurtz sees in the power structure is reducible to violence alone. Kurtz is a "classical" fascist in his belief in the restoration of collective will through myth alone; his fixation on this has caused him to scrawl "Drop the bomb! Exterminate them all" across a page of his report on Vietnam policy. Thus Kurtz contains within him the quotient of the division caused by dominant ideology's contradictions. Kurtz's "dialectic" is stalled between

antithesis and revolution. The only analysis for this is Kurtz's entrapment by ideology; he cannot provoke change because he has too much internalized the old world. The fact that he understands the contradictions of a system that prevents pilots from writing "fuck" on their bombers only aggravates his self-hatred, his moral schizophrenia and withdrawal from society. Willard earlier noted that Kurtz "broke from them, then he broke from himself." Willard also says he "never saw a man so ripped apart."

We must remind ourselves that Kurtz's self-destructiveness is shared by Willard. Willard baptized himself with vodka in his hotel room; Kurtz cools his burning brain with water. Willard also lacerated the hand he is to use against Kurtz during his Saigon "imprisonment." Willard, the regenerating knight, is as "torn apart" as the dying king he is to eliminate. Even if Kurtz, the symbol of a moribund America, had vitality that would transpose itself to Willard's soul, Willard is himself too far mentally and physically depleted to be the seat of new cultural energy and initiative.

Following the mythic dimension of the narrative, the Kurtz compound is the primordial chaos into which American civilization has returned. Ostensibly, based on the Fisher King myth invoked in the last reel, Willard's murder of Kurtz will provide closure and suggest the start of a regenerative process. Willard's murder of Kurtz, however, is carried out for wholly personal reasons. Willard says: "They were going to make me a Major for this, and I wasn't even in their fucking army anymore." Willard's process of identification with Kurtz has distorted his role of emissary of the collectivity. Both Willard and Kurtz have succeeded in unmasking the regenerative myth. It seems that the shot displaying The Golden Bough and From Ritual to Romance in Kurtz's library coincides

with the movement of the film from narrative to myth back to narrative. By citing the Frazer and Weston books the film names myth and makes its operation impossible. Lévi-Strauss's theory of the end of myth is demonstrated by this process.

One may also suggest the necessity of Lévi-Strauss not only in the evidence of the film's romantic elaboration of myth, but in the very utilization of myth to explain self-consciously recent American history. Unlike earlier American cinema (including Coppola's own Godfather films), Apocalypse Now makes its mythic structure transparent. Coppola has remarked that one purpose of his film is to "put Vietnam behind us."²⁴ His language suggests that the film is supposed to have the regenerative function of restoring myth; this notion is affirmed by Coppola's sense that we can "forget" Vietnam by pretending it was not part of an ideological system that remains in place. The contradiction here is Coppola's conscious invocation of myth to explain history along with the conventions of art. Coppola does not seem conscious that myth and ideology are consubstantial, that to expose the bankruptcy of myth is to expose the failure of the ideology supporting it. Coppola does not equivocate about his ending, despite his removal of the "napalm inferno" sequence depicting the destruction of Kurtz's compound. The ending is bleak, with the murder of Kurtz signifying for victim and executioner a flight from historical responsibility, whereas the corresponding slaughter of the caraboa suggests the drawing together of the community. The despair in both Willard and Kurtz defines Kurtz's death as a refusal of myth and an attempt to escape the entrapment of taboo established by the charismatic father and the

²⁴I refer to Coppola's much-quoted program notes later used to publicize the film.

history generated by totemism. The horror of Apocalypse Now lies in its assertion that nothing can fill the vacuum after we acknowledge Frazer and Freud, that history must close down once myth has been named.

It should be apparent how The Last Wave and Apocalypse Now share in common the theme of lost myth, and how each film takes a different stance in acknowledging this as a myth unto itself. Both films are pessimistic, but they vary in their levels of self-consciousness and abilities to see the relationship of myth to various social formations and to the issue of societal recuperability. The Last Wave acknowledges myth as an expression of the unconscious mind and regards the death of myth as an indicator of the death or repression of a large realm of mentation. In this the film seems conjoined to efforts within scholarship to find new syntheses among disciplines; anthropology, psychoanalysis, religious studies, and Marxism can (and probably should) be used simultaneously in discussing the "myth" at issue in the film. The apocalypse the narrative addresses maintains, as stated, a traditional view of the inevitable failure of humanity. The film contends that the exposure and analysis of myth cannot sustain itself for long; instead of joining its enterprise to the work of Eliade or Lévi-Strauss, The Last Wave offers as a new myth the notion that the refusal of myth has continued for "too long" and that retribution must occur. Although the internal sources of apocalypse are localized in David's self-discovery, the apocalypse is ultimately portrayed as external and outside of human intervention. Of course it is possible to read the tidal wave as metaphor for the upheaval in David's life (and in the society he represents) that has gone unrecognized and unattended, but the tendency of the film (typical of the horror genre) to see the threat finally as external reaffirms apocalypse not as revelation but doomsday.

Instead of showing concern for how humanity can become reinstated in the sacred and once again get "in touch" with myth, Apocalypse Now suggests simply that myth, at some point, was destroyed by repetition, and that it can no longer work in support of a society's self-concept. Apocalypse Now might be termed a reactionary work not for any casual, amoral, non-critical perspective toward the Vietnam War, but for its tendency to let its deconstruction of myth drift away from a firm analysis of the relationship of myth to history and ideology.²⁵ The film offers an excellent examination of the symptoms of social failure by its panoramic portrayal of the disintegration of language and the mythic codes providing national cohesion, but it proposes, once again, that the resulting chaos is inevitable and outside the control of the society that created these myths in the first place. To say that the hero/savior is now an impotent figure or a demon (rather than an angel) is to perpetuate the same failed mythic apparatus. The failure of the film to reduce myth to an ideological foundation is simply due to the film's origins in a production industry. In fairness it may be said that the revolutionary act of Apocalypse Now is its exposure of myth to analysis and its attempt (however muddled) to tie imperialism to the reconstitution of myth, the same project found in Conrad. The criticisms aimed at Apocalypse Now have been aimed even more severely at Conrad, and most of these critiques show naivete in their demand for a rigorous ideological method in the work of art. It is sufficient to say that a work is revolutionary in its ability to unmask codes

²⁵One could suggest that the work of Max Weber be marshaled in "justifying" the tendency of works such as Apocalypse Now to explain ideology growing out of religion and myth rather than the other way around. The Marxist could argue that the Weberian view is at the root of the apocalyptic work and the substance of apocalypse, i.e., the inability to see self-defeating internal contradictions and therefore repeat disastrous patterns.

and to refuse to accept myth as a given; Apocalypse Now could then be termed very revolutionary, even as it loses itself in a commemoration of a lost world.

I have cited these two films chiefly as works containing the principal aspects of apocalypticism found not only in the fantastic film but in a variety of mainstream cinema. What we say about the sense of apocalypse in The Last Wave and Apocalypse Now could be said about most of the works in the preceding chapters. Both of these films see apocalypse as the basic realization that civilization is a bankrupt wasteland--at various points going so far as to invite psychoanalytic, anthropological, and ideological criticism--while asserting that analysis has little value in forestalling collapse or effecting revolutionary change. These works of the international cinema could be seen, then, as a way of examining the earlier apocalypse of America's Puritan beginnings. The exposure of collective belief to science and philosophy is shown by these films only to cause an ambivalence and upheaval that worsens the crisis, since the ties to old conceptions of civilization's contract with the divine cannot be broken or substantially transformed. The anxiety about apocalypse in The Last Wave, Apocalypse Now, and the horror films arises out of a sense of guilt over a tampering with, perversion or neglect of a sacred contract. The Last Wave is unique since it deals with this problem as a transcultural crisis; Apocalypse Now makes epic the work of Escape from New York, Taxi Driver, Dawn of the Dead, and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre in exposing the specific failures of the cult of the hero, regeneration through violence, the construction of the city and consumer society, and all of the images of popular, male-oriented fiction that attempt to prop up these myths. The calamity described in Apocalypse Now is more

particularly American, even as it explains itself with texts having universal relevance. It would be unwise to propose that The Last Wave and Apocalypse Now provide a theory of modern apocalypticism, but what they share in common with the other films described here suggests that their controlling premises might be brought to bear in analyses of other works as the new obsession with apocalypse keeps asserting itself and becomes repetitious and convoluted.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that several different types of apocalypse have been identified in the course of this study. By way of recapitulation with reference to the films discussed, the principal types are:

- (1) Films of barbaric regression. These include the works of Hooper, Craven, and Cronenberg. These films are devoid of any mystical or metaphysical element (except by way of alluding to the noticeable lack of any transcendent element to modern experience), their horror depending instead on the sense of a world insane, fragmented, teetering on the edge of oblivion because of problems endemic to human civilization, particularly problems related to American expansionism and industrial capitalism. In some of these films there is, however, a sense of a dead mythic past, a notion especially evident in the films of David Cronenberg, whose doom-laden allegories contain elements of ancient myth. These elements suggest, as Cronenberg himself has remarked, that the belief in apocalypse is recurrent throughout history. For the most part, the films described in Chapter II use folklore and myth to suggest either a tragic culmination to assumptions about man conveyed by myth or the remoteness of civilization from mythic origins.
- (2) Films of demonic possession. Aside from restating the centrality of the devil both to the concept of apocalypse and the nature of horror, these films demonstrate ambivalence concerning

the viability of traditional religious belief, not only because of the prominence of psychoanalysis in explaining evil, but because of a resultant ambivalence about the configuration of evil as both religion and science are subjects of doubt. The films with the strongest apocalyptic quality have a pronounced sense of this ambivalence. The films described (Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist) make "progressive" references to the notion of evil being born out of the mind, while at the same time portraying the devil as an external, objective being outside human control. On the one hand these films show a very modern, pessimistic view of social failure, while at the same time asserting the traditional religious view of the loosing of the devil as divine retribution.

- (3) Films of urban apocalypse. These films have solid roots in apocalyptic literature by their use of the city as the key symbol of the collapse of all human enterprise. Most of these films (including Escape from New York, Dawn of the Dead, Mad Max, and Taxi Driver) are important for their connections to Biblical or otherwise archetypal myth, and for their self-reflexivity, their many references to popular art and to a broad range of American folklore. By such allusions these films emphasize the bankruptcy of myth, not to suggest so much the distance of modern art from mythic origins, but to examine some assumptions about the forms of myth purveyed by popular art. Most of these films therefore constitute a deconstruction of American popular art while they engage in a simultaneous assault on particular aspects of society, including consumer culture.

- (4) Films describing the death of myth. Peter Weir's The Last Wave and Francis Coppola's Apocalypse Now can be viewed as works offering a summary statement and a form of explanation concerning the contemporary sense of apocalypse. The Last Wave shows some knowledge of anthropology's exploration of this topic as it describes a form of mass psychosis brought about by Western civilization's distance from myth. Apocalypse Now also contains this theme, but focuses more specifically on apocalypse arising out of a dead language system, depleted cultural rituals, and the death of institutions important to the American self-image, including the charismatic hero-figure.

Obviously, there is a good deal of overlap within these groups, with films of one category giving varying degrees of emphasis to thematic elements apparent in others. The breakdown of language and the loss of myth are shared (in different ways) by Cronenberg's films and Apocalypse Now. Other themes of Apocalypse Now, including the Wasteland and the hero's death, are implicit in Escape from New York, The Road Warrior, and Taxi Driver. The "trashing" of past American culture is shared by the great majority of the films described; the anxiety over the loss of religion and myth--a theme visible in many films--is addressed directly in the demonic possession film's attempt to prove the efficacy of belief in the modern setting.

Hitchcock's Psycho and The Birds were touched on earlier in the attempt to describe the complexion of the apocalyptic horror film and the controlling premises of all the films herein. Psycho forces the horror film to look at psychopathology, rather than the supernatural, for

explanations of a spirit of chaos gradually disrupting a complacent American middle-class society. The Birds continues on the same track, but ignores psychoanalysis as it ignores any causal explanation that could propose a solution for a situation totally out of control. The Birds shows the peculiar contradiction of the modern apocalyptic work. By refusing an interest in scientific explanation or systems of causality, its pessimistic apocalypse seems especially modernist, yet the very nature of this attitude refers backward to an ancient belief in the helplessness of humanity in the hands of a vengeful God.

Suffice it to say that apocalyptic consciousness is increasingly pervasive in the international cinema. The New German Cinema has a markedly apocalyptic bent, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's Hitler, a Film from Germany (1977) and Volker Schlöndorff's Circle of Deceit (1981) being the two most recent examples. Syberberg's seven-hour film suggests (among many other things) that Nazism and the collapse of Germany signalled the End of the World, that humanity is now separated from God, and that the consumer democracy left in Hitler's wake is (in Syberberg's words) a Cultural Hell. Schlöndorff's film shows the crisis in the Middle East in apocalyptic terms, as a transcultural reversion to barbarism. The director uses a journalist as a figure of impotent Western man, emotionally unstable and politically naive, capable only of abstracting political revolt through the media, turning it into spectacle. Circle of Deceit also suggests a circle of repetition and deceit in ordinary middle-class life, where men and women avoid communication and children are inured even to the "primal scene" of human sexuality.

What can be re-emphasized here is the horror film's importance in providing a model of explanation for the resurgence of apocalypticism

in popular art. An inspection of the above typology (which falls short of being comprehensive) should make the reader conscious of its application to numerous films outside the genre, and how the horror film is important primarily as it becomes a vehicle for permutations of the apocalyptic tradition. As this writing comes to a conclusion new apocalyptic horror films proliferate. Tony Scott's The Hunger (1983), a sophisticated re-telling of the Dracula story, is a very self-conscious fable of the collapse of upper-class society immersed in dreams of an eighteenth-century utopia. Sam Raimi's The Evil Dead (1982) and Ted Bohus's The Deadly Spawn (1982) repeat many of the premises of The Birds and Night of the Living Dead. Literally all of the horror films in release in the early '80s refuse any hope for society. The protagonist is never allowed an avenue of escape; the community is unable to overcome the force of disaster.

Obviously numerous key questions have not been fully addressed here, including the current social, cultural, and ideological points of origin of apocalyptic consciousness; while some attention has been paid to the relationship of apocalypticism to history and ideology, the dialectical operation of apocalypse in contemporary life and the need it fills are subjects for future investigation. The most important aspect of apocalypticism evidenced in the fantastic cinema is its unremittant pessimism, a sense not too distant from the apocalypse of the Puritans except for its emphasis on the unreclaimability of man and, more important, its exposure and dismissal of numerous ideas generated by American myth. While the atmosphere of doom, nostalgia, revenge, and retribution of the current apocalypse has some continuity with tradition, the utter dismissal of institutions previously relied on for a constructive critique of society makes

this apocalypse not so easily understood by synchronic interpretation of American culture.

Since the international nature of the new spirit of apocalypse has already been asserted, it can be suggested that cinema is projecting a sense of the end of civilization that is a disconnection with traditional myth. Whereas previous themes of apocalypse detail the end of civilization due to the violation of sacred contracts, current themes maintain the older concept of the inevitability of collapse while asserting that the mythic conceptions sustaining these contracts (with their ability to hide other, historical processes) were always invalid. Much of the chaos emanating from the theme of apocalypse in the horror film comes from the sense of division discussed in earlier chapters, where apocalypse suggests also the inability to make decisions--to construct a new society or to maintain contact with a mythic past.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Abrams, M.H. Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature. New York: Norton, 1971.
- Adam, Karl. The Christ of Faith: The Christology of the Church. New York: Mentor Books, 1957.
- Adams, Brooks. The Law of Civilization and Decay. New York: Vintage, 1959.
- Annan, David. Catastrophe: The End of Cinema. New York: Bounty Books, 1975.
- Auerbach, Erich. Dante: Poet of the Secular World. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Ballard, J.G. Crash. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1973.
- Barthes, Roland. Mythologies. Translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Hill & Wang, 1972.
- Batailles, Georges. Oeuvres Completes. Paris: Gallimard, 1970.
- _____. Literature and Evil. Translated by Alastair Hamilton. New York: Urizen Books, 1973.
- Baudrillard, Jean. For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. Translated by Charles Levin. St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981.
- Berman, Marshall. All That is Solid Melts Into Air. New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone, 1982.
- Blatty, William Peter. The Exorcist. New York: Bantam Books, 1972.
- _____. William Peter Blatty on "The Exorcist". New York: Bantam Books, 1974.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew. Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era. New York: Viking Press, 1970.
- Britton, Andrew, et al. The American Nightmare. Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. Jesus Christ and Mythology. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

Burroughs, William S. Cities of the Red Night. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981.

_____. The Wild Boys. New York: Grove Press, 1969.

Campbell, Joseph. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949.

_____. The Masks of God: Creative Mythology. New York: The Viking Press, 1968.

Charles, R.H. Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism, and Christianity. New York: Schocken Books, 1963.

Cohn, Norman. The Pursuit of the Millennium. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.

Crozier, Michel; Huntington, Samuel; and Watanuki, Joji. The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission. New York: New York University Press, 1975.

Culler, Jonathan. On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Dillard, R.H.W. Horror Films. New York: Monarch Books, 1976.

Dodds, E.R. The Greeks and the Irrational. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. Notes from Underground and The Gambler. Introduction by George Steiner. New York: The Heritage Press, 1967.

Eisenstein, Sergei. Film Form. Translated by Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949.

_____. The Film Sense. Translated by Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1942.

Eliade, Mircea. Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954.

_____. Images and Symbols. Translated by Willard R. Trask. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1952.

_____. Myth and Reality. Translated by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1965.

_____. The Sacred and the Profane. Translated by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1957.

Everson, William K. Classics of the Horror Film. New York: Citadel Press, 1974.

- Fiedler, Leslie. Love and Death in the American Novel. New York: Stein and Day, 1960.
- Fletcher, Angus. Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964.
- Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- _____. The History of Sexuality - Volume 1: An Introduction. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- Fowle, Wallace. A Reading of Dante's "Inferno". Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Frazer, Sir James G. The Golden Bough. 1890; reprint ed., New York: Avenel Books, 1981.
- Freud, Sigmund. Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1952.
- _____. Totem and Taboo. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1948.
- Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Giamatti, A. Bartlett. The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- Girard, René. Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structures. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965.
- _____. Violence and the Sacred. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.
- Gordon, R.L., ed. Myth, Religion & Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Harbison, Robert. Deliberate Regression. New York: Knopf, 1980.
- Hassan, Ihab. The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.
- _____. The Literature of Silence. New York: Knopf, 1967.
- Hays, Peter L. The Limping Hero: Grotesques in Literature. New York: New York University Press, 1971.
- Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London: Methuen & Co., 1979.

- Hillman, James. The Dream and the Underworld. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Hoberman, J., and Rosenbaum, Jonathan. Midnight Movies. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1983.
- Jameson, Fredric. The Political Unconscious: Narrative as A Socially Symbolic Act. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- _____. The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Johnstone, Christopher. John Martin. London: Academy Editions/St. Martin's Press, 1973.
- Jones, Ernest. On the Nightmare. London: Liveright Books, 1953.
- Kawin, Bruce. Telling it Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972.
- Kermode, Frank. The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Ketterer, David. New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science-Fiction and American Literature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974.
- Kott, Jan. The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy. Translated by Boleslaw Taborski and Edward J. Czerwinski. New York: Vintage Books, 1971.
- Kurzweil, Edith. The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Lawrence, D.H. Apocalypse. 1932; reprint ed., New York: Penguin Books, 1975.
- Leaming, Barbara. Polanski: The Filmmaker as Voyeur. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.
- Leitch, Vincent B. Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Lesy, Michael. Wisconsin Death Trip. New York: Pantheon Books, 1973.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. Structural Anthropology. Translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- Marks, John. The Search for the Manchurian Candidate: The CIA and Mind Control. New York: Times Books, 1979.

- Marx, Leo. The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- May, John R. Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971.
- McBride, Joseph, and Wilmington, Mike. John Ford. New York: Da Capo Press, 1975.
- McGinn, Bernard. Apocalyptic Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1979.
- Melville, Herman. The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade. 1857; reprint ed., New York: Grove Press, 1949.
- Miller, Perry. The New England Mind: From Colony to Province. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. The Crucified God. Translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Mottram, Eric. William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need. London: Marion Boyars, 1977.
- Murray, Gilbert. Greek Studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946.
- Murray, Scott, ed. The New Australian Cinema. London: Elm Tree Books, 1980.
- Naremore, James. Filmguide to "Psycho". Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973.
- Nash, Jay Robert. Bloodletters and Badmen: A Narrative Encyclopedia of American Criminals from the Pilgrims to the Present. New York: M. Evans & Company, 1973.
- Peary, Danny. Cult Films. New York: Delta Books, 1980.
- Phillips, Elizabeth. Edgar Allan Poe: An American Imagination. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1979.
- Pirie, David. A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972. New York: Avon/Equinox, 1973.
- _____. The Vampire Cinema. London: Crescent Books, 1975.
- Pointon, Marcia R. Milton and English Art. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.
- Prawer, S.S. Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Romero, George A., and Sparrow, Susanna. Dawn of the Dead. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

- Rothman, William. Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Sagan, Eli. The Lust to Annihilate: A Psychoanalytic Study of Violence in Ancient Greek Culture. New York: Psychohistory Press, 1979.
- Samuels, Stuart. Midnight Movies. New York: Collier Books, 1983.
- Sanders, Ed. The Family. New York: Avon Books, 1972.
- Schillebeeckx, Edward. Jesus: An Experiment in Christology. Translated by Hubert Hoskins. New York: Vintage Books, 1981.
- Slotkin, Richard. Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860. Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
- Sobchack, Vivian Carol. The Limits of Infinity: The American Science-Fiction Film. Cranbury, N.J.: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1980.
- Spoto, Donald. The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976.
- Suvín, Darko. Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre. Translated by Richard Howard. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Truffaut, Francois. Hitchcock. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.
- West, Nathaneal. The Day of the Locust. New York: New Directions, 1962.
- Weston, Jesse. From Ritual to Romance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920.
- Willemsen, Paul, ed. Roger Corman: The Millennial Vision. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1970.
- Wood, Robin. Hitchcock's Films. New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1965.
- Zamora, Lois P., ed. The Apocalyptic Vision in America. Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1982.

Articles

- Bartholemew, David. "The Exorcist: The Book, the Movie, the Phenomenon." Cinefantastique 4 (Winter 1974):10-21.

- Bergoffen, Debra. "The Apocalyptic Meaning of History." In The Apocalyptic Vision in America, pp. 11-37. Edited by Lois P. Zamora. Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1982.
- Britton, Andrew. "Sideshows: Hollywood in Vietnam." Movie 27/28 (Winter 1980/Spring 1981):2-24.
- Cassara, Ernest. "The Development of America's Sense of Mission." In The Apocalyptic Vision in America, pp. 64-97. Edited by Lois P. Zamora. Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1982.
- Carroll, Noel. "Entr'acte, Paris, and Dada." Millennium Film Journal 1 (Winter 1977-1978):5-10.
- _____. "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)." October 20 (Spring 1982):51-83.
- _____. "Language and Cinema: Preliminary Notes for a Theory of Verbal Images." Millennium Film Journal 7/8/9 (Fall/Winter 1980-1981):187-218.
- _____. "Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings." Film Quarterly 3 (Spring 1981):16-21.
- Chute, David. "The Ayatollah of the Moviola." Film Comment (July-August 1982):27-30.
- Detienne, Marcel. "Between Beasts and Gods." In Myth, Religion, and Society, p. 218. Edited by R.L. Gordon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Edwards, Phil. "Inside Cronenberg." Starburst 2:40-44.
- Ehrlich, Cindy. "Doin' the Devil's Sound Effects." Rolling Stone, 28 February 1974, p. 16.
- English, Deirdre. "The Dark Heart of Apocalypse Now: Telling it Like it Wasn't." Mother Jones (September 1979):34-37.
- Farley, Ellen, and Knoedelseder, William K. "The Real Texas Chainsaw Massacre." The Los Angeles Times, 5 September 1982, Section 4, pp. 1-7.
- Garret, Eldon, and Dunn, James. "Cronenberg." Impulse (Spring 1981):6-11.
- Jacobs, Diane. "Coppola Films Conrad in Vietnam." In English Novel and the Movies, p. 211. Edited by Michael Klein and Gillian Parker. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981.
- Kieckhefer, Richard A. "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement of the Mid-Fourteenth Century." Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 4 (1974):157-176.

- Kinder, Marsha. "The Power of Adaptation in Apocalypse Now." Film Quarterly 2 (Winter 1979-1980):12-21.
- Lerner, Robert E. "The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities." The American Historical Review 3 (June 1981): 533-556.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "How Myths Die." New Literary History 2 (Winter 1974):269-281.
- Lotringer, Sylvere. "Sex and Decadence." Semiotext(e) 10:287-296.
- Marcus, Greil. "Journey up the River." Rolling Stone, 1 November 1979, pp. 56-62.
- Pappas, Peter. "The Superimposition of Vision: Napoleon and the Meaning of Fascist Art." Cineaste 2: 4-13.
- Sammon, Paul. "David Cronenberg." Cinefantastique 4 (Spring 1981): 10-29.
- Sharrett, Christopher. "Operation Mind Control: Apocalypse Now and the Search for Clarity." Journal of Popular Film and Television 1 (Spring 1980):34-43.
- Sontag, Susan. "The Imagination of Disaster." In Against Interpretation. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1961.
- Stewart, Garrett. "Coppola's Conrad: The Repetitions of Complicity." Critical Inquiry 3 (Spring 1981):455-475.
- Tessitore, John. "The Literary Roots of Apocalypse Now." The New York Times, 21 October 1979, Section D, p. 21.
- Villard, Bob. "Road Warriors." Cinefantastique 4 (May/June 1982):6.
- Williams, Tony. "Assault on Precinct 13: The Mechanics of Repression." In The American Nightmare, p. 67. Toronto: Festival of Festivals Publications, 1979.
- _____. "Family Horror." Movie 27/28 (Winter 1980/Spring 1981):117-126.
- _____. "Interview with Wes Craven." Journal of Popular Film and Television 8/3 (Fall 1980):10-14.
- Wood, Robin. "Apocalypse Now: Notes on the Living Dead." In The American Nightmare, pp. 91-97. Toronto: Festival of Festivals Publications, 1979.
- _____. "An Introduction to the American Horror Film." In The American Nightmare, pp. 7-28. Toronto: Festival of Festivals Publications, 1979.
- Zamora, Lois P. "The Myth of Apocalypse and the American Literary Tradition." In The Apocalyptic Vision in America, p. 126. Edited by L.P. Zamora. Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1982.